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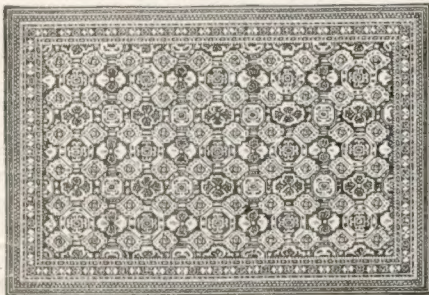
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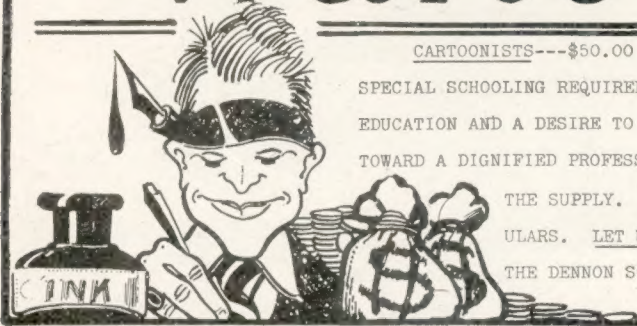
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No. 4

Tale of an Old-school Gentleman of the Seas — **Under His Own Law**



By
Edison Marshall

(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

PLUNDER'S LURE.

THE first day out of Rio de Janeiro, Mortimer suspended two of his crew over the side of the ship to efface the name, *Mary Parker*. Mortimer gave no reason; none of his crew dared ask him for one. It has been said that he was prejudiced against the name because of a Mary that he had known in his Oxford days; anyway, those who in after years had the misfortune to see this gray wolf, like an

ocean Nemesis, bear down upon them, could plainly make out her name to be the *Midnight Mist*.

Never was pirate crew organized as was that of the new-born rover, the *Midnight Mist*. Instead of a democracy, wherein the majority ruled and the captain had no power except in moments of battle, this organization was an absolute monarchy. Mortimer was the monarch.

Twoscore of ruffians gathered in the cabin to sign the articles. In most cases this constituted putting a cross opposite their names, as few of them

could write. They found them quite different from what they had a right to expect. Truly, the boatswain, the cook, and some of the other officers received a share and a half each of the plunder. Truly, the quartermaster, Slinger, received two shares. But the captain, instead of two shares, which was the custom for captains of rover craft to receive, was to take five shares.

"I don't like it," one of them said. "Two shares is all other cap'ns ever got, and I know."

"You do, sir?" replied Mortimer, almost purring. "And you don't like it? Perhaps you will like this better." His fist shot out and knocked the offender halfway across the cabin.

They read the other articles, and found that there was to be further inequality between the captain and the crew. He was to have his choice of the food and drink, and no one was to enter his cabin to partake of them. In fact, no one was to enter his cabin under any consideration, except by his permission.

"But that ain't been the custom before," another of the mangy longshoremen said. "Not that I'm objectin'."

"What has been the custom, pray?" asked Mortimer.

"The cap'n is elected by the whole crew." The man edged toward the door. "And if one of the Brethren wants to 'op in and 'elp himself to the grog, no one's to stop 'im. And if the cap'n don't suit, the gen'lemen elect another. But I'm not objectin'."

"I beg your pardon, it will not be that way in this case, gentlemen of fortune. I am captain so long as we sail together in this ship. You will notice it in the articles. Will you please read on?"

They read on, and found that, although the articles of the contract were revolutionary in some respects, they were not unreasonable. Every man could do what he liked with his

prisoner, and possess whatever he found about him. If a crew yielded without fighting, no prisoners were to be taken. No man was to rob another, on pain of marooning. In all disputes, the captain's word was absolute.

They read down to the end, and for those that could not read Mortimer read or translated each clause aloud. "Now you may sign!" he commanded.

For a few minutes they hung back; then Slinger, the newly appointed quartermaster, signed. The rogue Mortimer had just knocked down signed next. Then four or five others affixed their crosses.

"Now, look 'ere, cap'n," began a little Englishman at last.

"You have my attention, sir," rejoined Mortimer. He looked at the man contemptuously.

"I'll sign, I guess," and the Englishman added a cross to his name.

"But I won't!"

Mortimer turned, and there faced him from across the table a great, gaunt, bearded corsair who had ravaged many ships.

"You won't, did you say?"

"No. Your terms ain't reasonable." The man clenched his fist. "We want to elect our cap'n, and there's going to be trouble right here——"

"Indeed there is," said Mortimer quietly.

The table stood between them, too long a range for fists. The seaman's hand began to steal toward his breast, and Mortimer's shot toward his pocket. His pistol gleamed, and for an instant smoke and sound filled the cabin. The mutineer had gone beyond the land of mutinies. The rovers crowded about the table to sign the articles.

The *Midnight Mist* set forth on her career, and soon the whole world knew of her and feared her. Her sails were a sea of canvas; men-of-war chased her in vain. She swept down the South American and African coasts, her black

guns sinister, her black flag, with its death's-head crowned with a baron's coronet, ominous. Captains of lesser rover ships would have deserted their crews for any kind of a berth on this gray king of pirates. The helpless merchantmen would see her and flee like frightened birds, but many times they were overtaken. Then came pillage, and quite likely death for her crew.

Skippers came to know her gray body. White-faced, they would guide their ships into the nearest port at even her shadow on the water. But so heavily laden with rich goods and treasure were those African and Indian and South American traders that often they were not swift enough. The pirates piled up wealth. There was no talk of mutiny now; the slightest order of their captain was obeyed to the letter.

The fame of him had spread, and he came to be known as Black Mortimer. A hundred ships were rifled; many of them were burned, and many sent to the bottom. Sometimes not a single survivor was left to tell the ugly story. Sometimes only gold and silver were taken, but this was usually when the pirate's hold was full. Often his humor would take queer turns—but of these times, those who passed along the face of the sea did not like to think.

CHAPTER II.

BLACK MORTIMER'S WAY.

THE buccaneers, when they glanced with dull and squinted, vicious eyes at their captain, saw a man belonging to a different breed of creatures from themselves. Not that he was a higher breed. A frightened merchant sooner would have placed his fate in the hands of any one of them than in those of their suave and courteous captain.

The crew were yellow-toothed and dirty; what should have been the whites of their eyes was an evil yellow. Their

hair was long, unkempt. Their clothes were torn and old; their rippling muscles revealed themselves through the rags. Their feet were bare; stained and ugly feet they were, too. Their hands were coarse and thick, their fingers hardly long enough to encircle the good-sized hilt of a cutlass. Their deeds were many and horrible, but not one of them was wicked enough to look Black Mortimer in the eyes, as rogue to rogue.

He swaggered up and down his deck, this Mortimer, a tall, lean, muscular man. He was dressed in the height of fashion, yet in perfect taste. His stock was of the purest, whitest silk. His coat and his smallclothes were of rich, lustrous broadcloth, and his waistcoat was of silk. Heavily buckled, glossy pumps adorned his well-shaped feet. If he carried pistols, his belt did not sag with them. He bore neither knife nor cutlass, but in spite of this he was terribly armed. Leaning against the capstan, in easy reach was his famous weapon—a great, gold-embossed, oaken-handled pick.

The hands that rested jauntily on Mortimer's sides were not thick and short-fingered. Slender and white were they, as those of a musician. The fingers, long and tapering, were tipped with nails of pink pearl.

It was said of him that even in battle, while the faces of his corsairs were twisted and scowling and vicious, his was the same impassive countenance. His eyes were sleepy and languid, like those of a gorged tiger, but sometimes the light flowed into them, as if something had disturbed their latent phosphorescence. In color they were a hard, metallic gray. His other features were finely carved; his mouth was small and fine as a woman's.

But for all that it was an unpleasant face, for not a line nor a wrinkle, not a softening of a muscle indicated that anything of mercy or kindness or pity

lived in his heart and black soul—or even that the graceful body possessed a heart and soul.

No one seemed to know just who this Black Mortimer was, and none dared ask; but here and there, on occasion, it was whispered that he was the son of a great English nobleman. All that was known was the fact that suddenly he had departed from England and taken passage for Brazil, where an uncle of his had a plantation.

All that long journey from London to Brazil, Mortimer thought over his future and prospects. Incidentally he learned something of how to sail a tall-masted brig like the *Mary Parker*. Mortimer's mind was quick and brilliant, and doubtless he learned more in those few weeks than many seamen have learned in years.

By the time he reached Rio de Janeiro, he had decided a tame and quiet existence on his uncle's plantation would be most distasteful. He had tasted life and found it choked with delectable thrills. There were other ways for men of his spirit to make a living.

On board the *Mary Parker* he had met Slinger—a yellow-eyed, twisted, scarred, and powerful seaman who had known better days. In a tropical twilight they talked, till all the southern stars came out and shone in the young man's glittering eyes.

Slinger had been a buccaneer on those very seas. "The game ain't what it once was," had whispered Slinger hoarsely. "There ain't the holds crammed with gold out o' Peru. It was good—good, I say—a score o' years ago, and before the American Revolution. My uncle knew it then, in his own ship. It's been getting worse and worse, with these frigates. But I tell you, mate, that there's fort'n's, big fort'n's, to be picked up yet—in a short time, too. It'll be good for twenty years yet, and maybe fifty, for the trade is

heavy between these South American cities an' Europe and Africa. A good rover—with a good crew and a good captain—— Oh, my hand itches to get back into the game again!" He clenched his fists till the veins showed blue and horrible.

"Why don't you?" Mortimer asked.

"'Cause there ain't any good captains left alive. There's plenty to follow—ignorant rogues like me—but no one to command. Of course, there's a few good rovers still a-sail in the Caribs, but they're full up, and the rest of 'em are a scurvy lot. So I've got to be content with this kind o' a job, instead of plenty to eat and drink and a chest full o' clinkers. A gentleman with some spirit could make a game o' it, I tell you—a good game o' it—with a fast boat."

"Fast like this one, eh?" asked Mortimer lazily.

Slinger sat up straight and looked about with his shifty, yellow eyes. The port light hardly burned; above, the stars looked down in quietude.

"Just like this one," he whispered eagerly. "Fastest trader a-sail. New model—made in Maine somewhere—call her a clipper. Built for speed, so to smack away from the Brethren, for the States haven't any ships o' the line to scare 'em off. Pass the frigates, too. She's long and narrow and sharp at the bows, and rakish masts. She's a new boat, too, and a strong one."

Mortimer had further conferences with Slinger, and out of the talk came the seizing of the *Mary Parker* one night in Rio de Janeiro and her sinister transformation into the *Midnight Mist*.

He was smiling grimly in memory of all this as he walked the deck. Then a voice disturbed him. "Ship to port!" was the cry.

A sailing vessel, plainly a trader, was crossing to the port side. The word passed among the whiskered mouths; in an instant men came thronging from

the forecastle. There was Slinger, wiser and more yellow than ever; there was Munn, the boatswain; Brock, a marvelous mechanic and an expert carpenter; Schmitt, the coxswain; Old Limp, the real name of whom, if he had one, no one but himself knew.

There was Ferris, whose thumbs were torn and queer looking—he had once been hung up by them; Cressley, who had no eyelashes; Jim Mason, who had known a better life, though perhaps not so prosperous a one, and whose left hand had only a thumb and a little finger. But the mangled hand, looking most like a fish tail, could grasp a pistol and hold it firm.

Then there were Diego and Vivano and Gracierez and Rojas. There were Camilloz, at one time in the train of the royal Portuguese prince at Rio de Janeiro; and Enciso, of the same race. There were Rodet and Hasse and Keller. They were a motley and a vicious lot, and every eye was bright with the lust of battle.

"Stand by for action!" called Mortimer. He gave other orders, his crew responding at once. Some were at work at the capstan, and all the ropes were creaking. The sails spread, they drew in the wind, and away after the merchantman scurried the *Midnight Mist*.

Their prey was just a speck at first, and so the helmsman guided the rover to a point far ahead in the course of the trader. This meant a shorter chase, and incidentally cut off any possible chance of the unfortunate vessel fleeing into port.

Now Mortimer stood on his deck with his glass, and soon he could give the vessel's name. "She's the *Liverpool*," he said. "Brigantine—flying the British flag. Short company—rides as if heavily laden. She'll enrich our holds, mates."

Only rarely was Mortimer's humor

such that he called his subjects mates. Munn prepared the rigging hook and stood by. The pirate captain's eyes began to have a greedy gleam.

CHAPTER III.

LIKE WOLVES THAT WAIT.

THERE was confusion on the deck of the British brigantine, the *Liverpool*. The captain, through his glass, had seen the long, gray shadow, and his face had gone ashen. He looked closely; now he could almost make out the name to be the *Midnight Mist*. He could see that her flag was black with one white spot.

His voice rose shrilly as he gave an order—to put on full sail and take the quarterly wind. His crew of ten men understood the cause, but in spite of their fear, their shaking hands pulled mightily at the ropes. The chanteyman tried to roar a deep-sea chantey, but the voice hardly seemed his own.

Now, the captain of the *Liverpool* was giving other orders; the deck was a scene of confusion. Some of the sailors, now that the sails were set, dully tried to hide their valuables. Some were loading pistols, and another was rolling a small cannon into place. They were all Englishmen, these ten, and in their strong hearts was a resolve to die fighting; but the captain knew the futility of battle with such as these that bore down upon them. Nearer came the slim, gray shape, every sail hemispherical and every mast bending.

The captain of the *Liverpool* looked quietly up at his stubs of masts and his scanty sail, then quietly and sadly about his crew. "Don't raise an arm against them," he said at last. "If the wind would fail 'em—or something—we might get away by flight; but when they're near enough to get their guns on us, up with your hands. We'll save most of our lives by that." The crew looked at him with wide and frightened

eyes. "Nothing but a miracle would save us now," he added.

Then out of the cabin came the three passengers of the vessel. One was a young man, tall, big-muscled, carefully dressed. As yet he did not understand the confusion. The second was a middle-aged little man whose hair was prematurely gray. He was emaciated, with deep-sunken eyes that spoke of long illness. He was a clergyman, homeward bound; a missionary stricken with some Eastern disease.

The third passenger was a girl, twenty, perhaps, and the sunlight, when she stepped upon the deck, shone through her hair till it seemed of old gold. Her eyes were wide, but the sunlight could not shine in them; it could not penetrate their glorious fringe of lash. Her rich dress displayed the graceful curves of her slight body; her lips were red and fine, and her cheeks pink and velvety beside the pale and scarred ones of the sailors. She glanced from face to face with her glorious, dark eyes, and what she saw shot the color quickly from her cheeks.

"I had forgotten you," said the captain hoarsely.

"What is it?" asked the young man.

"Black Mortimer. You know what that means. They'll be swarming our deck in an hour or so. You and your sister and Mr. Howard hide your valuables—at once."

"We haven't many to hide," replied the girl. Her voice wavered, and she made a pitiful effort to repress the outward evidence of her fears.

The captain looked at her strangely. "He's a devil, but we can't fight him off. It means death for all of us if we try to—or captivity."

"Or captivity?" the young man echoed his words and turned to his sister. His eyes went suddenly wide with horror.

"What do you mean, captain?" asked the clergyman.

"Hush! And persuade the girl to do as I say. Miss Bronson, we've got to prepare for him. You go to the cabin."

"Oh, what will they do?" Her hands, small and finely formed, clasped at her breast.

"Go to the cabin now. Mr. Howard, go below with her." The captain's voice hardened. "Bronson, you stay here with us. No, we won't fight——"

The girl and Howard vanished down the companionway, and the brother leaped toward the captain with extended hands. "For her?" he cried. "There isn't any danger for her, is there? Oh, don't tell me there is!"

The captain did not answer, but Bronson read the truth in his face and in the face of every man of the crew.

"We'll die before he takes your sister," said Belding, the mate.

"But can't we hide her? In the hold—in a chest——"

"They'll search the ship from stem to stern. They'll open every chest and every drawer in search of hidden valuables. Not a chance for that!"

Into Bronson's face there crept a stern resolve. "He won't find her alive," he said.

For a moment all those Englishmen stood grave. Their manhood and their fears were battling in their minds, and at last fear won.

"You know what Mortimer did when the girl on the *Horace* was killed—before he came," said one of them jerkily. "It means death for us all, 'cause he's already seen her through his glass. You can lay to that. Maybe he won't take the girl."

"That's right—maybe he won't," said the captain dully.

"It won't do any good—to do *that*," one of the others said.

"I will!" Bronson half closed his fiery eyes. "Anything sooner than leave her to them——"

"You won't!" A great seaman an-

swered him. Another approached from behind and quickly pinioned Bronson's arms. "We can't let you murder the whole crew," he said. "Mortimer'll be here in an hour or so, and if he finds you'd—spoiled things for him, it would be Davy Jones' locker for all of us."

Bronson, numbed at first, began to struggle. Four of the great seamen had to hold him. Here was action, and action rubbed the dread from their souls. So they tied Bronson to the mast and stood back and looked at him. Then they looked out to sea toward the gray shape bearing down.

"He's gaining on us," said the mate. Now they could see the black flag with the naked eye. Now Bronson was sobbing hoarsely. "You are Englishmen," he cried at last fiercely. "You would do this to save your miserable lives!"

"Let him go!" suddenly shrieked a young seaman. Carson was his name, straightforward and brave his eyes, and twenty-one his years.

"Silence!" The captain sighed queerly and drew himself together. "Listen!" he went on. "We are Englishmen, and we won't sacrifice your sister to those dogs. Every one of us will die first, but it may be he doesn't mean any harm to her. I've heard o' times when he didn't. It would be folly to sacrifice her life and ours as well—unless we know for sure. I know how you feel, and we tied you up so you wouldn't strike too quick. But I swear I'll shoot her with my own hand, and him, too, before I'll let him take her. We can't fight against them. There's forty-five of them to eleven of us. We haven't got a pistol apiece, while every one of them has guns and cutlasses. They could sink our ship with their big guns."

"So they waited, and at last began to see that even the winds had betrayed them. The *Midnight Mist* was quite near now, and they could count the pirates on her deck. Like wolves that

wait for a camper's fire to die, the rovers seemed, as they leaned against their deck railing.

Over the *Liverpool's* deck hung a malignant hush. Bronson, tied to the mast, was whispering dully. The pale-faced crew stood waiting, as if for death.

The minutes sped away, and the *Midnight Mist* bore down on the *Liverpool*. On the pirate's deck Munn crouched, ready to throw the grapnel into the rigging of the prize.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH CRUEL POLITENESS.

MOST sorry to be an inconvenience, sir," said Mortimer, when he and his followers had boarded. "I suppose I have the honor of addressing the captain? I am delighted to meet you, sir. Of course, captain, you are aware of the object of this visit—your money or your life, please!" Black Mortimer smiled and bowed as he spoke his well-known greeting. He carried his famous pick jauntily upon his shoulder, its lustrous handle and golden decorations making it seem more like an ornament than a weapon.

The captain's face flushed with a mighty wrath; the bags beneath his eyes swelled red, but he fought down that suicidal anger, and only his eyes, by their blue fire, showed it when he answered: "Yes—and I suppose this is Black Mortimer."

"Pardon me for not introducing myself first. Those that know me in other than—er—a professional way call me Robert Mortimer. As captain to captain, I should be glad to extend to you that privilege. And would you mind telling me why this person is tied up?"

"He meant ill toward you, Mr. Mortimer. He is a passenger here, and he doesn't know the way of pirates."

"Why, bless my soul! 'Gentlemen of fortune' suits us better as a name—but

what is in a name? Interesting question, captain. Now, if you so wish, we will enter your cabin and discuss the terms of your surrender more at our leisure. Really this is a distressing business, sir."

"At your service."

Bronson followed them with terror-widened eyes as they turned into the companionway to the cabin. Meanwhile, the pirates, with oaths and blows, were searching the ship for treasure. The contents of the chests were thrown out and the valuables taken. There were little sacks of coins, wages saved in months of bitter labor. There were cases and kegs of liquors. In the hold was merchandise: some silks, some rare spices, some bronzes, and not a little jewelry. Part of the cargo was from India and was so rich that the pirates' imprecations changed to coarse and joyous jests.

But in the cabin was cruel politeness. Dorothea had risen when the two men entered, and stood with white cheeks and wide eyes.

"I don't believe I have had the pleasure," said Mortimer. His tone changed slightly, and something about the stiffening muscles of his face, the hungry red glare that flowed into his eyes, made the captain despair. "This is Miss Bronson; and this"—he spoke to the girl—"is Mr. Robert Mortimer, pirate and devil."

"A poor flatterer, the captain," remarked the rover at once. "Do you not find him so, Miss Bronson?"

The girl was eying him in amazement. "You are not the pirate?" she cried.

"A member of the Brethren—a gentleman of fortune—both are kinder names for me." His gaze turned to the clergyman, who had risen and now stood beside the girl, a brave but rather futile look in his sunken eyes. "And whom have we here, captain?" Mortimer asked.

The captain told him. A peculiar smile played on Mortimer's face as he glanced from the girl to the clergyman. "Ah!" he said. "A gentleman of the cloth. Interesting, captain, and perhaps opportune, as well."

The captain's brown hand began to slip toward his hip. "Hark ye, Mortimer!" he said. "Hark ye, blackest scoundrel that sails the seas! We have given our ship without battle."

"Very kind of you, I am sure—in the circumstances."

"We have not lifted a hand against you; but I swear that if you so much as touch this girl with your fingers we'll——"

"Tut, tut! Don't make a bore of yourself."

"I'll give the word, and every one of my crew will die fighting, and ten good men of yours, at least, will pay for it with their lives."

"Tut, tut! And pray, sir, why is your hand moving in that queer fashion? You surely are not reaching for anything? I suggest, captain, that you hand me that toy—butt foremost, please."

There was something terrible about Black Mortimer as he spoke in that deadly quiet way. His eyes shone, the pick on his shoulder moved slightly, gleaming. The captain's hand shook as he obeyed and handed over the pistol.

Mortimer tossed it through the open port and turned to the girl, who was staring at him with puzzled, fascinated gaze. "Our friend the captain is inclined to be uncouth," he said. "Miss Bronson, not in many a day have I had the opportunity of meeting such a charming girl as yourself. Can't we be friends?"

The girl sobbed. "Oh, please go away!" she begged. "My money—my valuables—you can have them all."

Instead he drew near. She looked for an instant into his eyes, and the bright gleam within them terrified yet

fascinated her. She looked away and glanced fearfully back.

He laughed. "Don't be afraid of me, madam."

"Then go away."

"I begin to understand. The man outside—he is your husband?"

"My brother; and if you——"

"Your brother, eh? Now that is a relief. I thought he was your husband, and that would have caused complications. I thought the captain said 'Mrs. Bronson.'"

His fine white hand crept out and touched hers. She sobbed chokingly, then tried to shake it off. She felt its magnetism steal into her veins; then she quieted and looked appealingly into his face.

"No harm shall come to you, Miss Bronson. My men shall not touch you."

"But you have touched me—and you are the worst of them all."

"You will not think that way of me soon, I hope." He looked at her intently. "Will you step up on deck with me? You, too, captain, and this other gentleman."

Mortimer led the way up, and the others followed. Bronson, in his bonds, turned his face to the pirate, words pouring from his lips.

"Really, sir, your conversation is distressing," was Mortimer's sardonic reply. "Your sister is perfectly safe, I assure you. Not one of my men shall harm her."

"And you—you? Oh, release me, sir, then give me a fair chance to fight!"

"Tut, tut!" Then he turned to his crew. "Got it all aboard, eh? Munn, bring the lady's bags and anything else of value in the cabin. Will you step upon our deck, Miss Bronson?"

For an instant every eye was fixed on him. The girl's were wide and pitiful. Her brother's were full of the fire of murder. The sailors were squinting with anger. Those of Mortimer's own crew were mostly curious.

There was a moment's wracking silence. Bronson tugged at his ropes like a maddened animal. Forest, one of the youngest seamen, drew a pistol, but Old Limp saw its gleam in time. Old Limp thought he was aiming it at Mortimer; yet the gleam in the sailor's boyish eyes was not that of murder. It was that which comes with a great resolve. Believing that nothing, not even Mortimer's death, could save her, he was about to aim it at the girl. But Old Limp was too quick for him. Forest went down under a savage blow.

The sailors stood back, cowed, then; all but Carson. He cursed Old Limp in a choked voice. Mortimer laughed a little, and Old Limp with him. The girl made no move to step over the railing onto the deck of the pirate vessel.

"Miss Bronson," said Mortimer, "will you step aside with me for a moment?"

Tremblingly the girl complied. When they were out of hearing, the pirate continued: "Dorothea—I believe that is the name your brother used?—it is awkward that we have so little time for such an interesting matter. My dear girl, destiny has brought us together. I understand your hesitation—and so does destiny, for it has kindly provided the—er—reverend person who is now staring me out of countenance. We are going to be married, Dorothea. Really it is quite romantic—a wedding at sea!"

The girl drew back, her hands at her throat. "Oh," she gasped, "you couldn't do——"

The words died on her lips, for those slim fingers were on her arm, compelling her along the deck. "Mr. Bronson," said Mortimer, "I have the pleasure of informing you that your sister has consented to be my wife. Mr. Howard, we have no time to waste—kindly perform the ceremony at once."

The brother's face was livid as he strained at his bonds. He pleaded

wildly, but Black Mortimer laughed and turned impatiently to the clergyman. The girl was sobbing hysterically. She knew that she was facing the inevitable, anyway; there was no escape. But she was not thinking of herself alone; she feared that if she refused, her brother's life and the lives of others would be sacrificed. She had heard of Black Mortimer's summary and terrible way of avenging the slightest opposition. Looking at this suave, handsome, and seemingly refined man at her side, she scarcely could credit the reports of him, but some instinct told her she must obey.

"You've got to do it!" cried one of the *Liverpool's* crew. "If you don't, he'll kill us all!"

The man's words were like a confirmation of her fears, and like the knell of fate. She stepped to Mortimer's side. "I am ready," she said, in a low voice.

"Mr. Howard," said Black Mortimer, "we are waiting for you. I see a bulge in your pocket—I presume it is a book. Will you kindly proceed? The language of this person who is tied up is beginning to annoy me."

Knowing that it had to be done, and feeling that perhaps what he was commanded to do was best in the circumstances, the clergyman drew a book from his coat and faced the smiling rover and the trembling girl. In a few minutes it was over.

"Kindly cross to the *Midnight Mist*, Dorothea," said Mortimer.

The girl darted forward, flung her arms around her helpless brother for one heartbroken instant, then complied with the request. Munn picked up her bags, and one by one the pirates followed her, each keeping a pistol trained on the *Liverpool's* crew.

"Now, my gentlemen," said Mortimer, addressing the men of the *Liverpool*, "I have detained you too long already. Bon voyage, my friends! As

for you, young man"—he stepped close to Bronson—"your charming sister shall be happy, never fear. I dislike to boast, but I assure you I have always considered that I possess all the possibilities of an ideal husband."

A whispered something, a promise of infinite vengeance, blurted from Bronson's white lips. Black Mortimer smiled again, saw that the hooks were free, and followed his crew back aboard the *Midnight Mist*.

CHAPTER V.

A GAME OF HEARTS.

THE first hour after the departure from the plundered *Liverpool* was spent in sorting the treasure. The money was divided at once, according to the specifications in the articles. As the crew had yielded without a fight, no prisoners had been taken, except, of course, the girl, so whatever was found on the persons of the sailors went to the common fund for division, instead of to the individual pirate that discovered it.

The rest of the booty, jewels and silk and bronzes and such treasures, were placed in the hold, later to be sold to the "fence."

The cheaper things in the cargo, the dried fruit, much of the spices, much of the cloths, and all of the provisions, were not touched. Mortimer estimated the haul at six thousand pounds.

But the most important find in the booty had no monetary value whatsoever. Mortimer discovered it while rifling the little sack of mail that the brigantine had carried—a letter from Godfrey Sands, at Bombay, to Prince Ogle, whose wife was of the ruling house of England. To Dorothea, who watched him fearfully from across the cabin, he had first apologized. "A rude thing to do, this reading others' mail," he said, "but it is an unavoidable detail of the business."

She saw his lips tighten and his eyes squint with greed, for the letter was as follows:

MY LORD, PRINCE OGLE: Your highness will be glad to know that at last I have been successful. The stones were in the possession of one of the richest of the inland rajahs. He gave them eagerly when he saw your gold. Never were such stones—bluish-white and pure and lustrous—one hundred, tapering in size, and each worth the cost of a tiger hunt. There is no doubt but it is the diamond necklace of which the rajah wrote, and I assure you, most noble benefactor, that Princess Isabel, your noble lady, will find them matchless.

I am leaving Bombay in six weeks on the *Rosamond*, which will carry me as far as Cape Town. From thence I will take the *Cornwall Maid*, and will meet your highness in London. Your servant,

GODFREY SANDS.

"In London, eh?" mused the rover. "And in six weeks." Then he turned to the girl. "I have neglected you long enough, Dorothea."

The girl shivered a little, then turned her face away. "I can't believe that it is true," she said. "I think that every minute I shall awake, finding it all some horrid nightmare." Her voice broke, then chokingly she continued: "You sitting there, reading letters; I here, not knowing, not daring to think what may happen next. In your power and that of your horrible followers!"

"Reading letters—but such letters they are! No, I'll not be cross with you for calling my company a nightmare; the letter I just read leaves me in too good humor. As to my followers—you need never say a word to them. They will never come within this cabin. If one of them sets foot on the companionway except by order from me, it is his death sentence. As for me—you will soon learn to think much better of me."

He held her eyes a while with his own. The color climbed in her cheeks. "Oh, you are not human——" she whispered tensely.

"But with many human impulses," he replied.

For a while they eyed each other in silence. She was gowned richly and with good taste. Apparently she was of the middle class of England; probably the industrial revival had enriched her father. Slowly he drew near her; it was going to be a game. "Yes, you are entirely in my hands," he said. "But I shall not take any advantage. Love must come freely to be of value, so don't be afraid of me."

He watched her, and saw a deep wonder come into her face. His words were spoken in an accent the world would not expect of a pirate. The tone was soft, gentle, almost tender. Only his eyes might have betrayed the fact that he was playing a cruel game, and she did not look into his eyes.

Dorothea's was a simple, loving nature. Suddenly what seemed to her a great idea flashed into her mind: This strange, terrible man, with his alleged crimes—what if it was given to her to win his heart and win him back to a better life? To awaken the man's better self! Perhaps there was a destiny in it; perhaps she, a humble girl, could change the heart of this Black Mortimer. "Show me your real self," she said, "and I will take you and judge you as you really are."

"Always, before, what I wanted I took. But I can only plead with you," he replied. He approached her, then lifted her hand. He did not grasp it eagerly or fiercely; he touched it with his finger tips, as if it were a holy thing, and slowly dropped it.

"Your hands—they touched mine—and they have done such things!" Her eyes widened.

"Yes, they have; but when they touch yours—they feel clean."

Impulsively she extended one of the little, shapely things to him. "Can it be that you aren't the devil I thought you? That you have a human heart?"

He did not answer, but suddenly Black Mortimer, with a sardonic smile that she did not understand, took her in his arms and kissed her. Then, leaving her with her thoughts, and the company of an old, brown volume of Shakespeare that she had brought with her from the *Liverpool*, he went up on deck.

The night was falling, and the pirates had lighted lanterns in their living compartments between the deck and the hold. Mortimer's mind turned swiftly from the girl in the cabin to another matter. He felt that he had won the girl, but quick, shrewd, and bold work was needed for the other venture. Already he had a plan.

CHAPTER VI.

IN TRAGEDY'S GRIP.

LIKE men awakening from deep sleep, the crew of the plundered *Liverpool* began to stir about. The pirate, under her black flag, with its crowned death, was swooping insolently off, her mangy raiders busy with their spoil. One by one the crew started, life came back into their blank faces and their horror-widened eyes, and their lips opened to drop half-muffled imprecations.

For a while they stood looking at the vanishing ship, heedless of the passing time. Their vessel drifted leeward. Then they glanced at each other, but for a time did not meet each other's eyes. The girl had been taken, and they had not fought for her.

Nor was this all that held the *Liverpool's* crew silent. Forest, the young sailor who had been felled by Old Limp, was dead; and now on the deck beside him was another figure. When the *Midnight Mist* sheered off, the *Liverpool's* captain, wild with shame and despair, seized a pistol and shot himself before any could interfere.

So the awe-struck crew stood silent.

It was Bronson's voice that at last revived them. "Untie me, will you?" he requested.

The brother of the girl spoke quietly, almost coolly. The mate, who had been staring significantly at his long, bright-bladed knife, mumbling, wondering why the steel was not spotted and red with blood, started to cut away the ropes. The others of the crew hurried to assist him—glad of action again—and soon Bronson was free.

He shook out his cramped muscles; for a while the sailors did not speak or look him in the face. Grave, quiet Englishmen were they, whose sympathetic hearts made them embarrassed. They stood white-faced and dumb, for what was it any one of them could say? Bronson dropped a gentle hand on the clergyman's shoulder. "You could not help it, friend," he said, "and perhaps what you did was best." With bowed head, Howard stumbled along the deck and went down to the cabin.

"We've got two men to bury," said Belding, the mate. "One of 'em is the cap'n."

The crew nodded their heads gravely. Bronson bent over the form of the youthful sailor. He lifted a cocked and ready pistol from the white, cold hand.

"Oh, why weren't you a little quicker, man?" he said.

"No one could be quick then," a brother sailor answered, as if for him whose voice had been so silenced. "It all came too sudden, and knocked us dumb, it did."

"Forest didn't hardly get his pistol out before the pirate got him," said another.

"And he laughed—afterward," came a hoarse whisper from one of the group.

Bronson's eyes grew suddenly bright as closely he studied the pistol in his hand. It was death, all ready. His eyes filled with tears at the thought. He looked up guiltily, and the mate read his intent. A kindly hand touched

Bronson's arm and crept along till it grasped his hand. Bronson started, and his dry throat emitted a half sob.

That half sob was so much better than the scalding silence that all the sailors looked relieved. "I'd better take it," said Belding. Bronson handed him the shining weapon like a schoolboy caught in mischief. "Besides"—and the grave, kindly voice sank to a whisper—"who will be left to make him pay, to see him pay, if you would go? It is to be your work, Bronson."

Bronson swallowed; then his waxen features relaxed. Slowly they reddened and the numbness of the first realization gave way to a terrible wrath; but it was over in a moment, and he was ready to do more than swear revenge. His mind was clear for thought and planning. "We'll make him pay," he said simply; "and when we do——"

Those faces about him twisted with hate at the thought. "But how?" It was the mate again.

"Trap him—disguise a warship like a trader——"

"It has all been tried."

"Everything hasn't been tried, and we'll try everything that is left. I have influence with the governments. I know a hundred ways. May I go with you to your cabin?"

"There is work to be done here first. There's the cap'n to be buried, and this poor devil of a Forest. After that we can talk and find a way."

"We will find a way," Bronson repeated. He stretched out his hand and clasped the mate's. "I have a sister to avenge."

"And I a captain." The two men looked into each other's eyes. Then out of the crew stepped a third avenger. He was a young sailor, beardless as yet, but with a zealot's fire in his eyes. "I, too?" he asked.

"Why you, Carson? This is a pact." Bronson turned to the youth. "Not to avenge money loss—money loss is noth-

ing. This is more. It is higher. Why you?"

The mate answered for him, very simply.

"Him—and him"—he pointed to the crumpled body of Forest—"was pards together."

So all three clasped hands, and the others watched as if in the presence of a solemn rite.

CHAPTER VII.

ON A DAZZLING QUEST.

ON the deck of a schooner, headed from Bombay out onto the South Sea, was one that dreamed of rich commissions and political advancement. He was Godfrey Sands, returning to his noble patron with a necklace worth the cost of a hundred tiger hunts.

It had taken more than gold to procure this necklace. More than piles and piles of gold. It had taken courage and daring and faithful service. It had taken intrigue and Occidental business experience. But Sands had succeeded; he had shown his piles of gold at the psychological moment, and the jewels were his.

Never was there such a string, was the sincere belief of Godfrey Sands. The diamonds had been collected slowly by generations of rajahs. Many times had they been bought and sold, one by one, and the gold that bought them had been wrung from starving peasants by tax collectors, by the looting of cities and the pillaging of tribes. Each had been fought for; each had been the motive for a hundred crimes. Murder and theft and deceit and intrigue and native wars—these things made up their history. But no hint of their dark past was revealed in their appearance, nor marred their luster. They were white and pure and bright, with a few bluer lights in their hearts, perhaps, like winter stars.

He congratulated himself, did God-

frey Sands, on his diplomacy, not only on his skill in bargaining for the stones, but on protecting them from the million desperate thieves that thronged Bombay. In fact, not a soul aboard, not one of those dark-skinned natives of the ant hill he had left suspected his real business in India, or dreamed that he was carrying the worth of a whole Indian principality about with him. He fancied he looked not in the least like a confidential agent of a British prince. The rich commission and the political advancement were almost within sight.

It proved a long journey down the east coast of Africa; day after day, beneath that virile sun, and nightly under new and brilliant stars; through long days of calm, then nights when the schooner struggled through towering waves. But always she struggled successfully; and at last they started around the Cape. A few days more, and they entered the harbor at Cape Town.

A ship rode at anchor there under the British flag, and the name on her bow was the *George III*. This, and the cannon on her deck, marked her at once to Sands' keen eyes as one of his majesty's police boats. At first he thought that her business in those waters was concerned with the political situation at Cape Town, and she gave him an added sense of security; but he was soon disillusioned.

A great voice, through a trumpet, roared from the deck of the police boat. "Boat ahoy!" came the call.

"Schooner *Rosamond*, out from Bombay," the captain answered.

"Heave to, schooner *Rosamond*, on his majesty's business."

There was no disobeying this command by a captain of a British ship. Wondering, he gave the order and watched the marines of the *George III*. swing a longboat over the side, manned by ten men. The sunlight gleamed on their carbines and cutlasses.

"Heave to, while we come alongside," was the next command. It was given by a neatly dressed officer in the bow. "We want to examine your papers and your passenger list."

"You will find papers correct. *Rosamond* carrying only one passenger."

With powerful strokes the boat drew up, and in an instant the ten men had boarded. Their lieutenant approached Forsythe, the captain of the *Rosamond*. "By order of his majesty, I shall have to bring a charge against you for harboring a dangerous and traitorous rogue," he said sternly.

The captain's heart sank. Such a charge might result in anything—depending on the humor of the king's officer—perhaps trial or a long interruption of the cruise. "There's some mistake, sir," he said. "We have only one passenger, and my crew has been with me——"

"Don't you dare to say there is a mistake!" the lieutenant broke in. "I am here to arrest one William Potter, alias William Cassock, alias Godfrey Sands, whom I have reason to believe shipped with you from Bombay. If such a person is aboard, you are hereby ordered to deliver him up to me. I am also empowered by his majesty's government to arrest and bring to London for trial any one harboring him or attempting in any way to defeat the purposes of justice. Here is the warrant."

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT TO QUESTION WHY.

THE officer spoke in suave, measured tones now, but his lips were firm, and the captain grew more fearful. The warrant was produced, done in parchment and bearing the royal seal. It stated that William Potter was a dangerous and traitorous rogue, wanted in London for many crimes, among which was the theft of divers pieces of jewelry, and that Lieutenant Smythe, of

his majesty's ship *George III.*, was to bring the felon, as well as any British subject attempting to harbor him, to London for trial.

Sands had heard his name called and had leaped forward with trembling hands. "I am Sands," he said; "Godfrey Sands; but I'm not Potter or Cassock—before Heaven I'm not! I'm a man who——"

Four of the ten men seized him. "Search him for any weapons," called the officer. "Don't let go his arms for a minute. More of you men, there——" Two others joined the four; and at once Sands was helplessly pinioned. "Get his pistol!" The officer sighed and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Take notice, men, that he admitted he was Godfrey Sands and gave his aliases offhand. That alone would convict him. It is a marvel, truly, that he hasn't cut the throat of every man aboard before now." He turned fiercely to the captain. "So you were harboring him, sir?"

"No, sir. I didn't know a thing about him, sir. He is a stranger to me."

"Quite likely! You got a share of his jewels. Where are they?"

"Before Heaven, I didn't, sir. I didn't know anything about him, or that he had any jewels. You can search the ship, and if you find a single stolen gem outside his person and effects, I'll go to London and stand trial."

"Very obliging of you." The officer's tone changed. "I wish to inform you that you will go to London and stand trial if I give the word. So you don't know him?"

"Don't know a thing about him, as he never told his business. He said his name was Godfrey Sands."

"Conclusive evidence, by the gods! And he didn't put any gems in your charge?"

"No, sir. All his baggage is in his cabin, sir."

"But it is a mistake—a mistake, I

say!" wailed Sands. "I'm Godfrey Sands, a respectable subject of his majesty, in the employ of Prince Ogle." The jewel buyer looked the picture of distress.

"Nonsense—and silence! You can tell all that to the court. If he doesn't shut up, thrust a handkerchief into his mouth." The officer turned to the captain. "He's a desperate man, and it has been a long chase. No mysterious deaths on shipboard since you left Bombay?"

"Only one——"

"Only one!" shouted the lieutenant. "You talk as if one were a trifle——"

"And that one wasn't mysterious. Seaman Banks fell from the masthead and——"

"Another murder to your record, villain!" burst out the officer, whirling on the unhappy Sands. "You must have had a hand in it——"

"But he fell——" rather feebly objected Captain Forsythe.

"Fell nothing! This man heaved him down. Don't I know the wretch?"

"But I can give twenty names of those that will vouch for me——" began Sands, when his mouth was free again.

"Vouch that you are the blackest rogue on two legs. Yes, William Potter, we've got you, in spite of all your tricks. Bring his luggage on deck, the rest of you. Captain, show my men where it is; and if you hold back one little piece——"

"I won't hold back anything, sir. It is all a surprise to me. We had no idea he was such a dangerous character." He hurried away, three of the marines accompanying him.

"I will stay with you, Bill Potter," said the lieutenant. "Gag his mouth if he says another word."

"You'll pay for this!" screamed Sands, as rough hands closed over his lips. "Then between fingers: 'It's a mistake of some kind, you blunderer!'"

"Silence, or I'll hang you to this yardarm, as I am authorized to do!"

Sands quieted at this. The yardarm would be such a handy place to hang a man. The angry glow in his cheeks faded; then he moaned as the strong hands of the redcoats pinched his muscles. The other members of the crew looked on, aghast.

In a moment the three British jackies and the captain returned. Two of them carried a chest, and the arms of the other two were full of parcels and bags.

"Did you search his quarters?" asked the officer.

"Aye, aye, sir," responded one of the three.

"Not a chance to hide anything there, sir," said the captain eagerly.

"We want only silence from you. On my word, I think I ought to hold you and your entire crew for harboring such a character."

"I am perfectly innocent, sir."

"Well, you may be. But if I find you're not——" He turned to his followers. "Grip him hard, and if you let him escape you'll die for it. Hustle him into the boat."

Moaning, Sands was pulled and dangled and dropped over into the longboat. The officer was the last to leave the deck of the schooner. "I will advise you, Captain Forsythe—that's your name, isn't it——"

"Yes, sir, that's my name," said Forsythe meekly.

"I advise you to be more careful whom you carry as passengers hereafter."

"That I will, sir." The captain hardly dared believe that the danger was over. He did not quite believe it until he saw the boat pull alongside the *George III.* and the marines thrust their captive aboard.

"He must have been a bad un," said Captain Forsythe. He saw the anchor of the *George III.* lift, and the winds catch her sails. Out of the harbor she

started to glide. Then a sudden, sickening fear gripped the captain's heart. The sound that he heard was the first cause of it. The crew of the *George III.* were laughing uproariously.

To Sands, who had been hustled to the deck of the *George III.*, this laugh seemed most terrifying. At first they only looked as if they wanted to laugh. He tried to collect his numbed faculties, but as yet he was only terrified and puzzled.

Only the lieutenant was still placid. "This may be the wrong man," he said slowly. "What do you think, Sir Quartermaster?"

A yellow-skinned, yellow-eyed creature, dressed in rags, responded. "Quite likely, sir. What of the herid'ary marks?"

"To be sure! Prisoner, will you kindly take off your clothes?"

"My clothes ——"

"You are not to question why—but I'll tell you: The man we are after had certain peculiar birthmarks."

Sands brightened a little, for now perhaps he could prove his innocence. But the leering faces about him were distressing. He began to pull at his garments, and coarse, ugly hands, thrust eagerly forward, helped him. On the deck his clothes were thrown, and in an instant he stood naked in the sunlight.

"You are the wrong man. I judge," said the lieutenant. This was too much for the crew; their stained mouths opened wide as they laughed. "Now give him a heave."

Four of the largest of the men seized him, one at each leg and arm. They lifted him, then laughed in his pale face. The others were roaring now, and even the officer's well-featured countenance bore a contemptuous smile. The four began to swing Sands.

"Once!" called the officer. They swung him far out, and Sands thought they were about to let him go, but they swung him back.

"Twice!" And again they swung him out.

"Thrice!" Sands felt their grips tighten, then their muscles contracted as they reached the highest point of the arc. They let go, and over the deck railing he shot. He rose like a white bird and catapulted down into the water.

Then, amid their laughter, the crew turned to other business. In an instant Captain Forsythe, from the deck of the *Rosamond*, saw the British ensign come fluttering down, and an ominous black flag, bearing a crowned skull, rise in its place.

Black Mortimer had turned the trick.

CHAPTER IX.

AS IF IN PROPHECY.

THE joyous roars of the crew of the *Midnight Mist*, alias the *George III.*, slowly died away. The ship was sailing grandly out to sea. Sands was swimming madly, and the crew of the *Rosamond* was launching a boat for him. His clothes, his baggage were scattered indiscriminately about the rover's deck.

"What do you think now?" asked Mortimer. "Now you will not whisper together in doubt over my plans! Could anything have worked smoother, mates?"

"But I don't see your purpose yet," said old Slinger, who was privileged. Besides, had not Mortimer just addressed him as Sir Quartermaster?

"You will in an instant; and it's good to see our Jolly Roger with its imperial death fly again. Now I will tell you; but first——" Mortimer paused and lifted a wide leather belt from the heap of clothes, pressing it with his finger tips. The others did not see his eyes narrow. "A queer belt our guest wore; I think I'll attach it to my wardrobe." Quickly he strapped it about him. "Our captive was a jewel buyer; and when

you take time to search his bags I doubt not that you will find something worth your while. Not much, perhaps——"

"Worth going to all this trouble for?" inquired Slinger.

"Hark ye, Slinger! It is for me to judge as to how much trouble we go. You presume on your long service. One of these days I'll have a little game for you. And, besides, what trouble was there? Our craft needed a new coat of paint, and luckily we encountered a remote harbor where we could give it her. This deeper, handsomer gray is not a whit less in keeping with our traditions. I wanted a little sport after all the trouble of painting. Now, Munn, search the gentleman's baggage."

The pirates watched with interest while the bags were systematically rifled. In clumsily hidden compartments Munn found considerable jewelry—rubies and pearls and a few diamonds set in gold. There were some loose stones, some gold-embossed ivory, one wonderful emerald, and a thousand pounds in money. The pirates, at first sullen as to what they thought had been a foolish risk, began to gloat.

"And one thing more," Mortimer spoke again, and the rovers paused to listen: "I enjoyed this little joke. I have decided to reward you. My share of the booty I'll give to the common fund for redistribution among all of you."

A cheer answered him. Mortimer had the confidence of his followers as never before. "Now, to your work!" he continued. "Diego, you and Mason rub out his majesty's name and give us back our own. Brock, you are a good mechanic; are you a good carpenter as well?"

"Aye, sir," responded Brock.

"Well, I have a few alterations to make in my cabin. I will give you final plans in an hour or so."

He turned into the companionway and entered his cabin. Dorothea rose

to greet him. She had changed in the weeks; her cheeks were thinner, and the shadows of her eyes had extended to the flesh beneath them. She was lovely in a tragic way. Her eyes were like sad, dark-purple pansies against the pallor of her skin. Her hair was still golden and beautiful, done in a great curl over her shoulder. She laid aside a book—her brown, leather-bound Shakespeare.

"Ah, reading, I see!" said Mortimer. "I have news for you. In a little year or two my stake will be large enough; then I'll turn my back on these dogs in the fo'c's'le and these picks and swords. Then you and I, Dorothea——"

Her eyes brightened, for he spoke almost tenderly; almost as he had spoken during the first week of the cruise. He was in a genial humor surely. She was beginning to believe that she was winning in the fight she imagined destiny had planned for her. So far, Black Mortimer's treatment of her had been gentle, splendid even. Despite her vague, instinctive distrust of the man, Dorothea had come to love him.

He sat beside her, telling her glowingly of his future plans. He was having some alterations made in the cabin, he said, and she was to occupy one of the apartments under the deck while the work was being done. "And now—I have something for you," he concluded.

Her eyes were tender and brimming when she looked at him. He unsnapped Sands' belt from about his waist, and, with the point of a stiletto that he picked from off the table, began to slit the leather. Therefrom he drew a lustrous, gleaming thing—a chain of concentrated light—a stream of silver purity—the necklace of a hundred stones. He held up the dazzling thing before her eyes.

"For me?" asked the girl, awe in her voice.

"For you." He slipped it over her

head, and so long it was that it looped about her throat again. He held out the stones, letting them dangle from his fingers; and his eyes were full of passionate love. But the girl—as girls will to the end of the world—misunderstood, and thought the loving glance was for her.

Then she whispered in his ear, and begged yet another favor; that he assure her once more of a wonderful truth.

"I love you," he answered obediently. Then his gaze fell to the shining things about her throat. "But here is a warning: Don't let one of the crew see you wear them; he'd cut your throat on sight. I'd scuttle a ship for the least of the stones."

"They are wonderful, but I am almost afraid of them."

"Why, pray?"

"When I think what you have done for them, what other men have done for them, and would do, I can see"—and she half closed her wonderful eyes—"yet more terrible things in the years to come. Always they will breed crime, Robert. There is the motive for murder in the cold heart of every stone."

"Nonsense, little woman!" he said kindly.

The look of joy she gave him, at the caress, would have melted any heart in the world but his. Then her eyes grew grave again, and she seemed to peer far into the years. "Darkness and crime and wrong," she said, as if in prophecy.

CHAPTER X.

A BIT OF LONDON GOSSIP.

GODFREY SANDS was his well-groomed self when his carriage dropped him at Prince Ogle's great city residence. He climbed the shadowy steps and made his presence known by means of a great brass knocker. A gorgeous servant admitted him, then car-

ried the word at once to the master of the house.

"Show him in," called that worthy, in a voice that Sands, in the hallway, separated from his employer by many walls and heavy tapestries, could hear distinctly. Sands smiled and entered.

Prince Ogle was sitting before an open fire, smoking a long clay pipe. The drifting cloud, the ruddy light, made his fine old face seem more than usually friendly. He was dressed in a red dressing gown, and looked the picture of comfort. At Sands' soft step on the mossy rugs he turned eagerly. "Well, did you bring 'em?" asked Ogle, as one that wastes no words. "I've been expecting you every night for three months."

"I was delayed, your highness. You got my letter?"

"No. Did you bring the stones?"

"Yes—of course," the man replied, losing ground. The fact that his letter had not arrived ruffled him; he began to see light. But at once he pulled himself together. "Of course I brought 'em; and you never saw such stones. I was delayed in Cape Town for a whole month—missed the first ship, and had to go via Lisbon. Can't imagine why you didn't get my letter, my lord."

"Well—show me the rocks! I've waited long enough for 'em. Don't tell me you haven't got 'em with you."

Sands, sure of himself, drew a leather packet from his pocket. This he opened, then drew forth a shining, beautiful thing that gleamed and shimmered in the half light of the room. Ogle stretched out his hand eagerly; and Sands, watching him intently with narrowed eyes, sighed as if with relief.

"They are beauties—marvelous!" said the prince. "By the gods, Sands, you deserve something rich! I knew you'd get 'em and bring 'em back if any one could. So this is the rajah's necklace?"

"He stripped it from the breast of his princess," replied Sands.

"He did! Bodikins!" cried Ogle, in delight. "The old wretch—that's too good! By my soul, Sands, you're the kind of an agent a man delights in. So he took them from his princess?"

"That he did, your highness. And mark my word, each of those stones has been the motive for more crimes than you can count."

"And you carried 'em in that little case all the way? Weren't you afraid of robbers, man?"

"Not at all. No one ever suspected me. I thought they would please your highness."

"Did you find anything else worth buying?"

"Not a thing that would be suitable to your lady's casket. Besides, there was hardly enough gold left to bring me home. The rajah raised his price ten thousand pounds."

"He did? The old bandit! Well, I won't mind that extra expense, Sands, for things have been going well with me. Ah, Sands—the House of Lords should reward me for bringing such a treasure into England—even at the cost of so much of the nation's gold. My children for generations will look at it and wonder at it and remember me by it."

"I would suggest, your highness, that this necklace should remain an heirloom through your family for generations. It is a marvel far too great to part with."

Sands caught himself abruptly, wondering if he had said too much; but Prince Ogle had eyes for nothing but the stones. He hardly heard. "Now, Sands—a glass of wine. Genuine Amontillado, there, and you'll find it the best, my good fellow."

"When I find any of yours that isn't the best—then is when I'll have my surprise," answered Sands, who knew his highness was particularly vain in re-

gard to his cellars. "Here's health to you. And how is the outlook for the Derby?"

"Not to be commended. And I suppose you are itching to hear what gossip is going the rounds?"

"As always, my lord."

"There is just one bit that I remember," Ogle began, pushing forward his chair. He was a confirmed gossip, and his eyes brightened as he talked. "You remember a young reprobate—Bodikins, he was!—attending Oxford, I believe, whose name was Robert Mortimer?"

Sands started guiltily, then his face went white; but before he could reply, Ogle, staring dreamily into the fire, had continued, in his eager tones: "Son of Baron Mortimer, and a young scamp if ever one breathed. He got in a scrape about one Mary Coburne, who was to have wed my friend of Hadley Manor. Mortimer, I think, took to piracy on the South Atlantic, and Miss Coburne struck off for Spain. Well, she has returned now, but still she refuses to wed Hadley. The foolish girl does nothing but talk and dream of that scamp Mortimer. Think of the old baron's son becoming a scurvy pirate!"

"And what else is going the rounds, my lord?" asked Sands, not relishing the conversation.

"Well—you haven't congratulated me, as yet, on the big news."

"What news? I've been in the South Seas"—Sands paused to blush, for he had literally—"and I haven't heard a whisper."

"What! You haven't heard? What is the matter with the press in those parts? Another son, my Sands. An eight-pounder, 'sbodikins! A little, hearty rascal that would do your heart good to see! I've bought a country place for this youngest son o' mine. And it's a prize, my Sands, a prize! Tyler's Ford they call it, because that wretch of a Watt Tyler did something

or other thereabout. No ford anywhere near that I could see, but it is a picturesque spot, by Jove! And you really must excuse me, Sands. This necklace—beautiful thing!—I must take up and present to Princess Isabel. I had almost forgotten it. Beautiful thing, I swear, and I'll see that your effort will be properly rewarded. Excuse me now."

They wished each other good night; then Sands waited till his master had left the room. Then he, too, went out, and with yet another glass of wonderful Amontillado in his well-lined stomach. He was in a more cheerful frame of mind than any time in the past three months.

CHAPTER XI.

INSOLENCE SUPREME.

IN those same three months, Black Mortimer and his crew had not been idle. They had sailed up and down the coasts of the southern continents, or like insolent birds swooped off across the main. They were never where expected. Ships they had scuttled, gold had they taken; then all of their cargo they had sold to the fence. Most of the money received had been put in a safe place.

The changes in the cabin had been made; for days the sound of clanging metal and pounding hammers had been heard from behind its walls. During the work, Dorothea, paler than before, with wide, sad eyes, had lived in one of the compartments, not unlike a state-room, under the deck.

The night that Brock, the mechanic and carpenter, had finished his work, and Dorothea resumed her old quarters in the cabin, the moon had watched an episode on the pirate's deck. Brock and Mortimer had conferred there, after all but the helmsman and the watch in the bow had gone to their bunks. The shadows had been too deep for these to see. The two began their talk in the

twilight, while the stars, one by one, were pushing through the deepening gray above. At eight bells they were still in session. Not one of the crew watched them or heard their talk, and what the moon saw it did not tell.

Not one had seen them separate, but the helmsman heard Mortimer, with lazy steps, descend the companionway shortly after midnight. The moon had set then.

Just a few of the buccaneers noticed that Brock was not present at mess the following morning. Many noticed it by evening. Then, the next day, after many inquiries, Slinger reported that the mechanic had disappeared. The pirate sovereign said, in explanation, that he had left Brock drunk with rum, and in all probability he had fallen overboard.

But now, three months after the affair with the *Rosamond*, the rover ship was among her old haunts in the Caribbean. There was work other than pillaging to be done here. The bottom of the *Midnight Mist* must needs be scraped. There were masts to be strengthened and sails mended. There were water casks to fill. And lastly, since she had not encountered a prize for some days, there were stores of provisions to be procured.

But all these things little concerned Mortimer; he knew his ground too well. He knew every treacherous current in those seas. He knew the winds and the tides and the half-hidden harbors. He knew of an island off Central America where conditions were ideally safe for such work as he had to do; a place where his men could shake out the sea cramps in their legs with impunity. Hither he hurried, his crew eager for dry land again.

It was a barren isle, except for a few palm clumps, a long stretch of almost level sand. On one side was a cluster of huts where a few miserable Spaniards eked out a desolate existence.

Mortimer, rounding the point of the island, always would see the wretched village before its occupants saw him, so surprise by an armed force lurking there was impossible. Besides, no one knew the time of his comings or his goings. Thus always he knew before he landed if the population was a half dozen greater, and a half dozen is impotent against forty.

Attack from the sea was unlikely. The open water stretched for many miles, and before a fleet of hostile vessels could bear down upon him he could leave his natural "dry docks" and put to sea. Only from the village and the land immediately around it was the wide view of the ocean cut off. Only rarely did his men stay on the isle at night; then he saw to it that the ship's lights were darkened so that her exact location could not be determined.

Mortimer's dry docks were nothing but the sloping sands. He would run the *Midnight Mist* aground upon the swell of the tide; then during the ebb his men would work like ants to clean her bottom of barnacles and deep-sea growths. The flood would pick her up and place her on the face of the sea again. Then at night he let her ride at anchor—generally in some inlet—all lights darkened. The chance was slim indeed that a man-of-war would find her here.

Now, on rounding the point, he saw only dark faces. The Spaniards were lying in the sun, the picture of indolence. Yes—there was one in different garb, whose complexion, through the glass, showed lighter. But one only was there, and after a moment's close inspection Mortimer gave the word to run aground. The ship soon rested on her bilge, and the pirates came crawling from her deck. At once they started to work, careening her over on her side. Some of the villagers came tiptoeing up to watch.

They gathered in a hesitant, half-

frightened group, these ragged Spaniards, with their black eyes full of awe and wonder. The pirates hardly turned to look at them. Then a man in a different garb came striding boldly across the sand. Mortimer, out of the corner of his eye, saw that he had hardly outgrown boyhood—twenty-one, perhaps—and his skin was fairer than the Spaniards. He looked much as Mortimer's own countrymen. He was ragged, unkempt, and long of hair, but big-muscled and resolute-eyed. He came briskly up, and Mortimer admired his courage.

"Which of you is Black Mortimer?" he asked coolly. The pirates turned to look at him; this manner of speaking was new to them, and more than took their breath away. It hurt their arrogance a little. "If you mean Cap'n Mortimer, he's over there," said Munn, the boatswain. "And you be careful of your way o' talking, youngster, or I'll——"

"You'll what, you mangy yellow-tooth?"

Munn whirled, more surprised than angry. That a youth should talk to him thus—in the presence of all his crew and his captain! But then surprise began to ebb and anger to flow. Besides, Munn had his reputation to uphold, for not a few of the vicious faces bore wide grins, and Mortimer himself was half smiling.

"Look 'ere, young un, if you weren't such a boy, I'd——" And thereupon followed a threat such as only a pirate could utter.

"And if you weren't such an old and feeble, broken wreck, I'd do worse to you."

The other pirates laughed loudly; then Munn swelled with genuine fury. He rushed up, his arms swinging like flails; the youth waited, expectant. He leaped aside a little, and his fist shot out like a battering-ram, jolting the rover squarely on his bristly chin. An

ox could not stand such a blow in the face, much less a grog-soaked corsair. Munn whirled ridiculously, then keeled over on the sand.

"Well, my man, that was a good blow," said Mortimer. "A clever swing, and a good one. May I ask who it is that beards us in our own den?"

"My name is John Harold Southley, once of London and his majesty's service. Who are you?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought that you understood that I am Robert Mortimer."

"So you are Black Mortimer, eh?"

"I prefer Robert, please."

"I wasn't looking for any one in that kind of garb. I thought you were a visiting grandee on the isle. By the gods, you look sleek and prim for such a scoundrel as you are!"

The pirates' jaws dropped open, but Mortimer laughed. The very insolence of the remark delighted him.

"You are a cocky youngster, I will say," returned Mortimer, flattered by the attention to his clothes.

"Not much younger 'en you."

"Not many years truly. But one of these times your elders will resent your impertinence. But why are you looking for me at all? And why did you leave his majesty's service?"

"That latter, Lord Robert Mortimer, is none of your concern; but since we're two rogues together, I'll tell you: Because I didn't like the mess. I've been drifting since, and being marooned with these greasy Diegos, here, I thought I'd come and have a look at the famous Mortimer. Now I'll help you scour her bottom."

"You are a cool one," responded the chief. "Now we will see if you can work as well as you can fight. Eh, Munn?"

Munn had climbed wearily to his feet, feeling his joints carefully. He looked up, still bewildered.

"A good arm the boy's got," he said.

Now all except the captain were at work on the ship. They cleared one side, below the water line, but saw that the flowing tide would not give them time to turn and scrape the other. So they rested a while, planning to finish the work another day. Southley had worked with energy seldom met in the tropics; and Mortimer had watched him with interest.

"Now, captain, I'd be about ready to leave this island if I had a good way to go," said the youth, again approaching the corsair chief.

"You would, eh? Become a member of the Brethren, eh? I suppose you mean you'd like to join my crew?"

"I mean just that."

Mortimer appraised him carefully. "But it takes a good man for my work," he said, "and the beard isn't heavy on your jowls yet."

"Almost as heavy as yours was when you turned pirate. And if there's any man in this crew that you think is much better than me, I'll try him out."

"You're a terror, aren't you? No, sir. I think there are a number of them, but if you ship with me I don't want you stiff in your joints like old Munn has been since you knocked him. He won't be any good for a day or two. Besides—you know the rover's end—a dance on air."

"That is the chance of the gentleman of fortune."

"On my soul, I believe you would be a credit to the guild. I believe we could find a berth for you. But hark ye: Hereafter, no more of your impudence with me. It will pass when you are a civilian, but when you are under my command you are to hold your tongue. You understand that, I fancy."

Southley looked him in the eyes with an intense expression Mortimer could not fathom. Just for an instant the naked lips set in a firm line. Yes, Southley knew that Mortimer meant his

words; and the remainder of the day, when all had boarded, the tone of the youth was different. He seemed as cowed as his mates in the forecabin. The tide picked up the ship in its mighty, azure arms, and soon she was riding free again.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ELUSIVE VESSEL.

EVENING descended, and Mortimer wondered if it were safe for him to linger in the harbor overnight. Its entrance was narrow, and a frigate approaching under cover of darkness might pen him in and make an end of him. Still, the sea seemed bare of danger.

But the explanation of Mortimer's success in his evil business had been his capacity to take infinite pains; so he extended his glass and began a systematic search of the horizon. At last he found what might mean danger—the white tip of a far-distant sail.

The intruder rode too far distant to reveal her nature through the magic of the glass, and of course it was quite likely it was that of a harmless merchantman; a prize, perhaps. But these were dangerous waters for pirates, plowed by governmental police boats and closely guarded.

His lesser brethren of the great fraternity of the coast quartered here. Here his famous predecessors had preyed on earlier commerce: Roc the Brazilian, Lolonois the Cruel, Montbars the Exterminator, Captain Sharpe, and Coxon and Edward Davis. Ah, the game was worth while in those ancient days: Spanish ships full of American gold, and commissions by royal governors to chase them down. Sir Henry Morgan, whose black soul guarded all the Brethren still, was of that time, as was the great Bras-de-fer.

The peace with Spain had come hardly a hundred years before the first

cruise of the *Midnight Mist*; and half a century from then had seen the business at its best. Johnson and Vane and Charles Edward England and Roberts and Kidd and Blackbeard—they had all preceded him, and most of them had come to the same dark end. The deep-sea monsters crawled the decks of their scuttled ships below him now. Here was once the paradise of rovers.

Mortimer knew the authorities were aware that he rusticated here. They knew that here was his very island, but because of its situation and character they could not prepare an ambush for him.

But they might make an attack by sea. So Mortimer gave the command that the sails be spread and the vessel guided onto the open ocean. Night came down soon after. Mortimer ordered that the ship be kept in darkness; then, with partially reefed sails, she rode at anchor.

But this night was as any other night of the five years; and morning dawned disclosing no new menace. Again Mortimer sought the west with his glass, and again he found the tip of a sail. As before, it hovered at the very limit of his vision.

A merchantman would have passed by now. Mortimer could draw no inference other than that the elusive vessel was a frigate watching for him. A patrol boat, perhaps, sent out by a government that now, since the wars with France were over, could devote their energies to the work of clearing the sea of such gentry as himself. It was of utmost necessity that the bottom be scraped, and he wondered if the distant craft could come up quickly enough to cut him off if the *Midnight Mist* were run aground again.

Carefully he estimated the distance and the wind, then decided to make the attempt. The ship was thrown upon the sand, and again his crew worked and sweated beneath a relentless sun.

Mortimer watched the suspected craft through his glass, but she made no attempt to draw near. In fact, she seemed to fade, but whether she was departing or whether a mist had fallen near the mainland, the filibuster could not decide.

Still suspicious, he left the harbor at twilight, but did not strike out for the open sea. Instead, he veered about the island, toward its head, into a region of complex channels and currents. He cast anchor at the very head, in a little spot of quiet water between two currents that swept on each side of the island.

He smiled a little as the ship came to rest against her anchor chain; then again he searched the western horizon for sight of the lurking ship; but the shadows were deep now; not a ship light's beams traversed the murk. The cook approached him soon. "My biggest water cask sprang a leak to-day and wasted," he said. "We've got to fill it up at once."

"To-night? We can't to-night."

"To-night's the best time. If we'd have to take off, we'd be in bad shape. The stores are low enough."

"How much do we need?"

"We got considerable, but it wouldn't be nowise safe to start out without a hundred gallon or so more. That creek flows just about two hundred yards away, and half a dozen men in a long-boat could fill up all the empty ones under cover o' dark. Then we can get away if the cat jumps."

"That is true. I'll see to it. Slinger, get seven men beside yourself for the work. Old Limp, you and Mason and Vivano——"

"I know the lay of the land, sir," said Southley, out of the gloom.

"That's right. You be one of the eight. Strike straight for the point, and don't veer off a foot. The currents divide on each side of the point, and you'll float to Hades if you get

caught in them. One thing more: don't strike a light. There are men-of-war all about us. The moon will be up soon, and you can see your way back this little distance by its light. The sooner you start, the better."

The boat was lowered and the eight men boarded her. They rowed off into the shadows; then the night fell deeply dark.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE SHADOW.

ON shore were muffled laughs and whispered imprecations. The eight had made their way to the deep and still but little river, and laboriously were filling the empty casks. It was slow work, with their buckets and funnels, and the darkness in which they toiled increased the difficulty. Only the starlight showed their gaunt and twisted forms, the powerful sweep of their arms when they bailed, and the gleam of a ring or a tooth. Then a mist swept along, out of the sea, obliterating every star. What light there was went out. The utter darkness turned the starlit river into a deep and whispering abyss. It blotted out the forms of the pirates. The dim shadow of the ship faded like geometric lines with no dimensions.

For an instant the rovers were awed and silenced; then they spoke again instinctively, to reveal their positions to the rest. They cursed and shuffled the river rocks about in an impulsive effort to shatter the sinister silence that had enveloped them with the gloom. "Some one strike a match," suggested Old Limp.

"You fool! The cap'n said not," Slinger replied.

"We can't work in this. But most of 'em are full, ain't they? These is all we can get back to the ship by midnight, anyhow. It's creepin' dark."

"We couldn't find the way in this gloom," said Mason.

"I could, blast me! Got all the casks

together? There's two empty ones—little ones."

They felt about and touched each other with their cold, wet hands. They found them all at last, and Slinger directed the carrying of the full casks. Four of the men carried the great fifty-gallon cask. Two carried a twenty-five-gallon cask, and the remaining two had each a ten-gallon breaker to manage. Southley had seized one of these when he saw that Old Limp, on the strength of his slight lameness, had the other. The shambling procession started back at a snail's pace. Those behind could not see the dimmest shadow of those in front, but even in the utter darkness they could find their way.

Each man bore from eighty to a hundred pounds, and in awkward shape, too. Often they had to stop to rest. The rocks were hard to traverse in the dark, and not a star peered out to guide them.

At last they heard the sea's quiet lapping above the hushed sound of the lazy river. They stumbled on, down onto the peninsula of sand. Cursing, mumbling, they deposited each cask in the longboat. The sailors soothed their smarting hands with their warm breaths.

"One of us 'as got to go back after those two little breakers," said Old Limp.

"Oh, let 'em go!" growled Slinger.

"You would, eh? And when will we get some more water? Those twenty gallon back there would keep us going a week on a pinch, with plenty o' grog to 'elp."

It always delighted Limp to rebuke Slinger, and the shrewder of his mates saw the reason. He was ambitious for the two shares that came with the quartermaster's place.

"Oo's in charge o' this?" demanded Slinger. "If you want 'em, go after 'em. I'll not."

"Sure, you carried a ten gallon up," said Mason, who had helped on the great cask and now was sitting on it. "I won't stir a step except back to the boat."

"I'll go," said Old Limp. "And w'ich o' you lazy lubbers'll go with me?"

There was evident hesitation. "Who had the other breaker?" asked Vivano, in his musical dialect.

"Southley," said Old Limp promptly.

"Besides, he knows the country," added Munn mockingly. "Didn't he say so? 'E was so anxious to come with us—let 'im take the extra trip. But course that struck the cap'n right; you can lay to that." Munn was famous for his bitter jealousies.

"That's fair enough," affirmed Slinger. "Just a little matter o' 'nitiation."

Southley arose, and Old Limp followed his example. "Then wait 'ere for us," the latter ordered. "And blast your laziness!"

Except for their hushed footsteps on the sandy peninsula, the others could not have told that the two had gone. The circle of darkness remained unbroken. The two men walked in silence except for the noise of the disturbed rocks beneath their feet. The island hush smothered quickly the lapping of the water, and finally the coarse conversation of the pirates at the longboat on the sand.

The pair stopped at the river brink; then quietly went to work. Southley bailed rhythmically and Old Limp held the funnel. In a little while the keg was full.

"Wait; I want to rest a moment," said the younger man. "Heaven, isn't it dark?"

"Devilish so!"

"Devilish is the word," Southley whispered close in his companion's ear; "like there might be a devil right close.

Almost close enough to reach out—and touch you—and get you."

Old Limp did not at once reply. In the breathless dark and quietude his breath came loud. "Blast you! What you want to talk that way for?" the old lame pirate cried at last. "Gave me a turn, it did. You're a fool, boy. There ain't no devils—in the—dark."

"Gloom—sort of sinister, ain't it?" went on Southley relentlessly. Then, as a man whose mouth muscles and tongue are strained and drawn by some overwhelming passion: "Like there is something dreadful about to happen."

Old Limp shivered, a chill on his thumping heart, and cursed. "Shut up, will you?" he cried at last. "You're a boy. You're a boy alongside o' me. You don't know what a devil is. But I've seen 'em—and I've done such things. I don't want to see 'em again. You're just a boy, and you don't understand."

His words trailed off; then the stillness seemed to deepen. He tried to pierce the gloom with his wide eyes—wide with fear—but Southley could more nearly succeed with his squinted ones; squinted and cold with some terrible kind of heart hunger. Both men breathed fast, and the sweat was starting from Old Limp's yellow forehead. He could not see his companion, but he heard him moving softly about on the rocks. "What you doing, boy?" he cried.

Then something cold and steely touched the flesh of his throat. It was sharp, too. "Don't move your head!" came Southley's voice. It was not slow and awed now. The words jumped at him like electric sparks, or leaped like cold blades thrown by a mountebank. "Do you know what that is—cold against your throat?"

"No—you devil!"

"I'm not a devil, but I think he's somewhere about, waiting." Southley shivered now in passion. "That's a

knife; and the slightest, slightest pressure"—Old Limp felt the skin bend beneath the point—"would send it into you.

"Don't move an arm—or a muscle," the terrible voice went on. "You couldn't see to strike in the dark, and if I feel the slightest tremor along your throat, in it goes! Don't even sob!"

Old Limp tried to whimper, yet not moving the muscles of his throat. "What have I done to you? Is it a joke? Tell me it's a joke!"

"Such a joke as you've played a hundred times; and it's going to have the same kind of an ending. Good joke, and the devil waiting in the dark—so near—will get the benefit of it. Don't scream, for I'd feel your muscles set for it; then you'd have two holes to scream through. Now, Old Limp—that's your name, isn't it?—answer politely, you murderer."

"Yes—but why, why? Oh, let me go! Don't do it here!" The rover was abjectly pleading.

"Why not here? The devils don't like to go into the light for a soul. First let me see if your memory is good. You haven't forgotten the *Liverpool*, have you?"

Limp hesitated, and Southley pressed the hilt a little. "No, I haven't forgotten. Don't press so hard—oh, don't!" The point had not yet pierced the skin, but death hovered close to Old Limp, he knew, and terror gripped him. "Are you——"

"Do you remember the lad that drew his pistol—who wasn't quite quick enough? Forest was his name. You laughed about it the next minute because he wasn't quite quick enough—and you were very quick. Haven't forgotten, have you? You laughed much as I think I'll laugh in a moment or so. Black Mortimer laughed then, too—and the devil will laugh, too, now."

"And you mean to——" Old Limp dared not think.

"I mean to see you pay, then see all your wicked crowd pay. I belong to a pact, and right now death is swooping down upon your ship; but I couldn't bear that you should fall to any one but me, and I'll do it my own way."

"You're not human! Have pity!"

"Queer that you should talk of pity—pity that didn't save Miss Bronson or Forest or the captain. Queer! But I've played and talked long enough. The devils are getting impatient—you can almost hear them whispering in the dark. We're just north of the ship, aren't we? Just north—just where we meant to be."

Just for an instant Southley's vigilance relaxed; Old Limp saw a slender chance. With a quick movement he leaned back and shot out to one side. The blade pierced only darkness. An instant later the arms of the two men were about each other; then, in that utter dark, they fought. Old Limp had seized the wrist of the knife hand.

Neither cried out; each ounce of strength was needed for combat. They struggled at the river brink and the rocks rubbed and clinked together. With muscles of iron Southley was trying to drive home the blade; Old Limp was exerting all the muscles of his corded back to hurl his opponent to the ground.

They staggered at last, reeled, and fell. On the slope down to the water they landed; then slowly they began to roll, arms interlocked. Limp still kept his grip on the younger man's knife hand, though Southley now had forced it around behind the pirate's back. Now Southley was underneath, Limp above, and the knife suspended highest. But on they rolled, and, like a mechanical thing, the avenger's body wheeled up. The blade was pointed toward Limp's back now, but all the power of Southley's sinewed arm could not force it home. They rolled on—drowsily—till the pirate lay beneath.

Then Southley pressed him down, down against the upturned blade.

The desperate grip relaxed, and Southley shook himself free just as the rover's body slipped silently into the water. The lame soul had limped away into the Shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITHOUT A FIGHT.

FOR a while Southley rested prone upon the sand. He rose at last, and, without a backward glance, went off a short distance. There, upon a flat rock, he emptied the powdery contents of a small, wooden box he carried. He piled stones around it, and put the end of a long fuse to the powder. Then, behind a low barricade of rock, he struck a match and lighted the other end of the fuse. He waited till he saw that it would burn, then he lifted the full cask upon his back and started blindly back toward the others. He panted up to them at last, and deposited the breaker with the rest.

"Where's Old Limp? You've been gone all night!" complained Slinger.

"He was filling his cask and complaining about the dark when I left," replied Southley, apparently out of patience.

"I guess you're not the man cap'n thort you were, or a little jaunt like that wouldn't faze ye," another remarked. "Ah, Limp! Hurry up!"

"Shut up, you fool!" whispered Slinger. No one answered, and the profound quiet that followed was oppressing.

"He doesn't hear you," encouraged Mason. He might have heard, but from whence Old Limp had gone he could not return.

Then came a strange answer. A red glare, eerie, mystical, sprang up beside the river from where they had just come. In the instant that it flared, the ship and coast and stretch of island

stood out in vivid relief against the shadows of the main. The pirates' eyes showed wide, but not too wide to see.

They saw their companions' faces, white as gravestones in the flare. They saw the empty cask—back at the river brink—but they did not see their missing mate. They saw the *Midnight Mist*—gray and sinister as ever. Then they saw what scattered all other sights from their mind. Grandly down the wind so near, glided two stately, avenging ships. The men-of-war had chased them down.

A shrill cry rose from the deck of the corsair craft. In the shiver of light from the burning powder the watch had seen the frigates, and, as intended, the captains of the frigates had seen the rover. Faintly across the water came the sound of their voices. Ropes were creaking, and the helmsmen were leaning hard upon their wheels.

"He's trapped against the reefs!" cried Bronson from the deck of one of the two, the *Canada*.

"We ain't got a chance," said Slinger, after the first moment of shock had passed. "They've trapped us good, and they've cut off our only way out. It's fight for us. Get this boat off, quick!"

"But we can't get back before they get there," some one cried despairingly.

"Yes, we can—if we pull hard. We'll be there to fight, mates, for they'd find us here, anyway, in the mornin'." They pushed against the loaded boat, jumping in meanwhile. The scraping sand gave way beneath them; soon they were afloat.

They dipped their oars, and all the time Slinger was thinking aloud. "Give way, you lubbers!" he commanded. "And we'll get there yet! We'll fight 'em, but there's two of 'em, and fifty on each deck. And there's cannon on each deck. They know they've got us trapped—not firin' yet, you see. Give

way, give way!" Now the men had found their stroke, and the boat, at full speed, fairly shot through the quiet, dark water. "There's two currents, and they can chase us down either—on either side of the isle. And catch us while we worm our way through the reefs. Pull, pull! Don't stop to breathe! Give way, give way!"

All at once the brilliant moon came out. "Hurry, hurry!" came a voice from the deck of the *Midnight Mist*. It was Black Mortimer who urged them. "We'll beat them yet."

So they rowed on; and now upon that moonlit sea they became aware that the race could be won only by a hair's breadth. The two frigates were bearing down on the rover; she was waiting for her absent eight. The frigates drew nearer, and so did the longboat. It looked as if all four crafts would meet.

"Hurry, hurry!" shouted Mortimer from the deck. The moonlight, shivering down, showed the decks of the men-of-war, spotted with cannon and lined with men. The gunners stood ready at their pieces, and the rover was in easy range. But the plans had been so well laid that capture of the entire crew and the ship as well seemed inevitable, and that meant recovered treasure, while the sharks, if the *Midnight Mist* were sunken now, would close each pirate mouth too soon. Was she not in stagnant waters? Would not the two ships overtake her, no matter which side of the island she chose to go, as she crawled through the perilous reefs? Either side, her way was blocked by them.

On the pirate, despair was inscribed on every countenance except one. Mortimer was still hopeful, although his face was drawn and set. His men waited impatiently for an order—to weigh anchor and take the long, long chance of flight—but still he hesitated.

Ferris mounted the quarter-deck, ter-

ror-stricken. "Why don't you turn us loose?" he bawled excitedly. "We ain't got a chance in a fight. There's four to our one."

Mortimer faced him sternly. "Are you commanding this ship?"

"No, but——"

"Do you know these currents? They sweep on each side of the island at this hour of tide——"

"Yes, and they'll catch up with us when we creep through the reefs and shoals, if we don't get away. We can't turn back or turn aside when we get in the currents. Leave those eight men. Don't sacrifice us all!"

"You dog—they'd catch us there, anyway——"

"Maybe they wouldn't've if you'd let us go when we first saw 'em. You've done for us all."

"They would have caught us just as quick. Now, back to your place!"

"We're going to run for it, see?" Ferris clenched a trembling hand.

"Mutiny, eh?" Mortimer roared. His hard, white fist jolted out and landed squarely; Ferris shot unconscious to the deck. "Now eight of you dogs put out in the other gig. All hands lower, and quick about it!"

The pirates, used to trusting their captain, obeyed at once. Even such an evident blunder as anchoring at the head of the island did not shake their confidence in him, for the most part. The boat was soon out, then Mortimer told its crew to stand by for his order.

The three craft drew near—the two frigates almost in pistol range. But the longboat was nearest, and coming swifter than the ponderous avengers. At last, cheering, the seven men drew up. Then Mortimer leaned far over the railing. "Can you hear me now?" he asked, in a low voice, to the crews of the longboats.

"Yes," responded Slinger.

Mortimer gave final directions for evading his enemies. In the moonlight

he saw the look of consternation fall from the faces of his men, but he failed to notice Southley go white. He warned them again to wait for his order. Then he threw to each crew a short tow-rope. Quite gravely he waited; and the marines on the frigates, listening for the command to fire, were puzzled.

"He means to give up without a fight," said Bronson to the British captain of the *Canada*. "Fire, if necessary, and sink the ship. I doubt if the girl is alive now, anyway."

"It won't be necessary to fire; he's got to give up without a fight. He's trapped at last."

"Now!" cried Mortimer from the deck of the *Midnight Mist*.

At once a dozen of his men began to work the windlass. The anchor rope, which was already drawn taut, creaked, and the iron pulled free. The same instant the pirates in the longboats pulled upon their ready oars. The two towropes tightened; then the brig began to glide through the stagnant water toward the current to the left of the island.

The helmsmen of the frigates saw the move, and their captains shouted orders. "He's taking the left side. Hard, hard to port!" they cried. The helmsmen responded with all the power of their shoulders, and the huge crafts veered. Their intention was to follow the *Midnight Mist* down the left current, then pin her among the reefs at the other end of the isle. But these helmsmen did not know the currents as did the rover chief.

"Now!" Mortimer called again.

The oars of his men shocked into the water; their boats shivered, stopped; and when the towropes grew loose, they turned them to the right. The ropes tightened again; the helmsman of the pirate strained at the wheel. And now, instead of plunging into the currents to the left of the island, the long-

boats glided into the right-hand currents and tugged their wicked mother after them.

"Hard, hard to starboard!" screamed the frigate captains. But they had seen the ruse too late. Mortimer, pretending that he had chosen the stream to the left of the island, had decoyed them toward that side, too; but, because of his tows and the greater nimbleness of his ship, he was able to turn suddenly to the right, leaving his enemies in the grip of the current to the opposite side from him.

The frigates were caught in the watery fingers now, and there was no escape. The helmsmen tried to turn their crafts in vain. Down they swept, down into the night, perhaps to encounter unknown reefs; and from the pirate deck, safe on the other side, mocking laughter followed them.

The crews of the frigates were bewildered. At first, when they had seen the rover escaping through the opposite channel, they had tried to obey the captains' orders to fire. But the ships had pivoted, the gunners' aim destroyed, and the few balls shot went wild. The officers bawled commands; the helmsmen tugged at the wheels. For a while, however, all that they could do helped them not a particle. Down toward the reefs they swept, and some of the sailors began to make ready for the crash.

But gradually their descent was checked. The strength of the current ebbed; and the captains, peering anxiously out upon the moonlit ocean, were able to see their way. The ships' lanterns were lighted; the marines regained their composure.

The ships were hardly moving as the reefs drew near. The captain of the foremost frigate, the *Canada*, called his orders, and through the narrow opening his vessel glided. The crew of the other, the *Coventry*, had to hold hard to prevent striking her stern, or else

crashing into the reefs; but in a few minutes both were through and safe upon the open sea.

Far out beyond the stretch of reef and island rode a lighted ship. The gleams from her lanterns grew constantly more dim. She was the *Midnight Mist*, scot-free again and gone out for further depredations.

Bronson saw her, then his lip trembled. Belding, once the mate of the *Liverpool*, stood beside him. "I suppose Carson's done for by now," said Bronson.

"Perhaps—but he's a resourceful lad. He may have swung it. He got aboard again."

"He wanted to be on deck for the fight, and there wasn't any fight. I made him out in the longboat from the island. It's death for him, and a slow, ugly death, too. But Mortimer will pay for it—just as he'll pay for what he has done before."

"But how—how?"

"Chase him down—that is the only way. Load our ships with supplies and chase him as we would a fox. He'll have to stop for water and provisions. He'll stop to plunder ships. Now we have the aid of the governments, we can keep after him and after him, in every sea, wherever he goes." Bronson straightened his shoulders and raised his face till the moonlight revealed its pallor. "The *White Heron* will be launched in a few more days, and her maiden cruise will be with us. Wherever he goes, we'll go, till at last we get him. If the governments fail us—and I don't think they will now—I've a private fortune to put into the work."

"We can't get him by trickery, that's certain."

"Run him down and run him down. The *White Heron* will be as fast as his own wicked ship, I think. It will be a long chase and a hard one, but we will win it in the end."

And thereupon, in a new resolve, they looked each other in the eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN THE HEART IS STEEL.

CARSON, known as Southley, wondered if he had blundered into death, for surely it was a blunder to thus bravely board the pirate in the face of death or worse. He knew the humor of the Brethren toward spies in their midst, and would not they be sure to suspect him in regard to Old Limp's disappearance? Yet the very fact that he returned to the pirate vessel was something in his favor.

He had come back with the rovers in the longboat because he wanted to be present for the surrender. The scheme had been so carefully worked out; he had judged that Mortimer would have no time to seek out treachery in the brief moment of battle with the marines of the frigates. But Mortimer's cleverness and his knowledge of the currents had spoiled it all; now the avenging ships were helpless on the other side of the isle.

At first Carson considered leaping off to take the chance of swimming, but the current was swift and the sharks waited along the ledges. His only course was to remain aboard and protest his innocence; and if he were found out—the cold light in his zealot's eyes revealed his resolution to exact a vengeance. He would do his part in the work of the triumvirate. He would not be too slow, as Forest had been.

Forest—the matter of him was closed and done. Old Limp had followed his victim soon, and, although the rest of the plot had failed, this much was a good thing.

And what a plot it was! Every detail had been worked out with care, after the aid of the two governments was secured. Carson had sojourned many days on the isle, waiting for Mor-

timer to visit his dry docks. It was the time of his semiannual visit, and he had come. It was Carson that had emptied some of the water casks, necessitating the excursion by part of the crew to the land. He had done it at evening, so the rover ship would have to linger through the night. The fight would be more one-sided, fewer of the marines would fall, with a portion of the pirate company on shore. But from thence the plans began to go wrong.

Carson had judged that Mortimer would linger the night in one of the many little harbors, trusting to darkness to shield his position. The frigates were to come up close and wait till the powder flash revealed the pirate; then they were to bear down and trap their quarry. But Mortimer, always vigilant, had anchored in the junction of the currents; then, by strategic maneuvering, he had put the isle between them.

Mortimer had given the order that the lanterns be lighted; now he was ready to make inquiries. Gravely he stepped down from the quarter-deck, and quite resolutely Carson clutched the stock of his pistol. "Which of you ignited that powder?" he asked abruptly. "It all but ruined us. Is there treason aboard?"

"Old Limp lighted it, sir," said Slinger.

"Old Limp? Where is Old Limp?"

"On the isle. He was all by himself, filling up the last cask, when the flash came. Like as not the lubber ignited 'is powder 'orn. He was complainin' about the dark all evening. Yes, sir, he was all alone, he was, when all at once the flash came. We left 'im on the island, we did."

"Good enough for him! Those beautiful frigates will be back to-morrow, when the tide turns, and pick him up; but more likely he'll hide among the Dons. Disobeyed my orders, did he? Good enough for him! Now to work!

Skipper, head straight north." And he called his orders for the night. "Keep your weather eye open for a trader. I have a present for her."

He mounted the quarter-deck again; then he turned into the cabin. Dorothea was lying in her berth, her face buried in the pillows. Her hair, like a wonderful mantle of old gold, drifted loose about her. She did not turn her face to him. "Well, we got out safely," said the pirate. "What is the trouble—are you ill?"

Her shoulders shook; then she lifted her pale but still lovely countenance. Her eyes were dark and accusing. "Yes," she replied, in an intense whisper. Her slender, white hand rested upon her heart. "Here!"

"Heartsick? What now? You know I couldn't pay attention to you while I had those frigates to deal with. Brace up, and don't look at me like that."

His tone was more than cold; it was almost harsh.

"It isn't just to-day. It is all the time since the first week, when I thought—Heaven forgive me for thinking it—that you had room in that frozen, black heart of yours for love. But it wasn't love; it never was. You couldn't love. I wish you had killed me that first day."

At first he scowled a little, then his lips curled in a smile. "I've never seen you show so much spirit, dear," he said.

"Dear—you call me dear—but you don't mean it! Do you, Robert? Oh, do you—tell me that you do! Is your love—that what I thought was love—is it all dead? Tell me that it is just your way."

Her wide, appealing eyes looked into his; there they read the truth. In a moment of penetrating vision she saw his heart. Little, loving Dorothea understood at last just how little her love had meant to this cold, hard man. At

first she pleaded; then wept; then her nerves gave way.

Not one of the lawless crew could have steeled himself against her as Mortimer did that day; none could have told her his future plans with such cold brutality. He had grown tired of the cruise, he said, and they would part at the first opportunity.

At the end of it all she buried her face in her arms in utter misery. She cried as a child might, and had there been a spectator he might have thought Black Mortimer was touched with pity, for he approached her with stealing steps and for an instant looked down at her. He bent over her and caressingly placed his hands at her throat. He took them away in an instant. In them gleamed the necklace of the rajahs. He had taken it back.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT A WORD OF SYMPATHY.

STRAIGHT into northern waters, as fast as a brisk quarterly wind could carry her, rode the *Midnight Mist*. She neared no frigates to make her veer about. For many days she did not see a prize, and her stock of water and provisions was running low. The crew became disgruntled, and some of the more superstitious predicted dire things. Even Mortimer felt the contagion of their pessimism. He grew more irritable than they had ever seen him.

In the first place, he did not know what manner of craft was following him. One day he thought he saw the tips of two sails, but lost them soon. Then, a few days later, after tacking in and out of the shadow of the coast in search of prizes, he saw them again. The time he had lost had enabled them, sailing more of a straight course, to maintain the same relative distance between them. He knew now that they were not traders, and they got on the pirate's nerves.

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Secondly, they had not encountered a prize for days; the merchantmen he had seen had been too large and well manned to attack with safety. Lastly, they were rapidly passing the waters of their nativity, the deep blue spread of ocean beneath the ever-comforting sun. They were nearing the temperate regions, where the wind pierced cruelly Mortimer's silken garb when he stood upon the deck.

All these days Carson had lived among the basilisks in the forecabin. He had eaten of their mess and drank of their rum and slept in their soiled bunks. To all appearances he had become one of them; but he went to his bed nightly with a contempt in his heart for them. Only Mortimer he admired, and with that admiration was a scalding hatred.

Meanwhile, he was at work—at other things than reefing sails and scrubbing decks. He was thinking, planning, for he believed that if the fraternity of avengers gained their ends, it would be through his sole effort. The police boats, so far as his naked eyes could determine, had given up the chase.

One day at work he caught a glimpse of Dorothea. He had glanced down the companionway and had seen her, like a lovely, fragile flower, at the door of the cabin. In a flash she recognized him as a sailor of the *Liverpool*; and at first her face showed disgust that he should thus have fallen. Then, with her woman's intuition, she suspected that of which as yet not one of the pirates had dreamed—his purpose. His heart bounded, did Carson's, for, although he had learned from the talk at mess that she still occupied the cabin, he had not expected to see this slight, appealing creature—she whom he had admiringly watched from his work on board the *Liverpool*.

He perceived at a glance her white skin, her heartsick eyes, like dark flowers, her tender, girlish throat; then a

vast pity flowed to the depths of his heart. She was dressed in garments Mortimer had taken from traders; her arms, though tapering and still beautiful, looked pitifully white out of the lace of the bodice. She smiled a little in recognition.

Carson glanced back. Most of the pirates were below deck at mess, and those who remained were not watching. Mortimer was in the hold, examining his booty. Such was often his custom in these latter days. The youth would hear his steps on the hatch in time. So Carson strode down into the cabin. "Miss Bronson," he said. With quiet tenderness he took the two little hands she stretched out to him. His heart flooded with warm blood, and he felt a deeper hate than ever for the master of the ship. She smiled wistfully, and his eyes grew misty. "Dorothea—poor little girl!"

It was the first word of real sympathy she had heard since the fateful capture of the *Liverpool*, and she almost loved him for it. It was the first word, and she broke down before its healing influence. Her dry, sad eyes flushed with comforting tears—though sad tears they were, for hearts, choked with internal bleeding, drain their bitter contents off at another's sympathies. Quite naturally and tenderly he took her in his arms and held her while she sobbed. "Oh, you must go!" she cried at last. "What if he would find you here?"

Carson's hands clenched. "I'd strike him down——"

"Hush!" She covered his lips with her hand. "Oh, how can we escape from this—hell?"

"We can, I know," he assured her. He glanced swiftly about the room. The walls were of planks, either of very dark wood or stained dark. The ceiling was low, only a few inches above his head. The furnishings were plain, but handsome. Three things

drew his attention most. One was the brown volume of Shakespeare on the square table. He glanced at Dorothea, and realized at once it was hers. The second was a deadly looking whip, a cat o' nine tails, that hung from a nail in the port wall. The third was a broad, wide shelf against the fore wall, covered and heaped up with pistols of every kind and shape. Mortimer had them here for contingencies; they were the spoil of a hundred ships. At a glance Carson knew that they were loaded and ready.

"He might come any minute," whispered the girl. "Please go——"

"At once; but at the first opportunity I'll come again. I will think something up. And keep your heart brave, Dorothea."

"We will work together?"

"For vengeance." The words came grimly.

She looked at him and hesitated. A woman's love is not quickly dead. Her hand went to her heart for guidance, then she remembered that last cold insult—that of the necklace. Her curved lips set. "Yes," she whispered tensely.

Then Carson crept up the companionway. The sanctity of the cabin had at last been violated by one of the lesser ones.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON A FOG-SWEPT DECK.

CARSON met the girl again the next day. He had a plan for their deliverance. He gave her certain instructions, and they agreed upon a signal. Then they talked; she told a little of her story, and Carson's heart went out to her.

But in a way this planning for escape was vain indeed; Black Mortimer, though he knew nothing of their scheme, already had taken the matter out of their hands and laid his own plans. Incidentally he expected to have a little sport out of the episode.

Then the ship encountered a fog—a stranger to these natives of southern seas. The northern waters through which they coursed had spawned it. It laid its cold hand on the pirates' hearts, and a vague dread seized them. They thought they could never catch a prize in its depth. But Carson believed a kindly god had swept it there, for, as he stood lost in the infolding vapor, his plan, that had been dim at first—as dim as the masthead through the mist—flamed out clear and bright. Had the vapor been less dense, the pirates might have seen that his eyes were glowing. In the midst of his fantasy there came a cry from the bow, and he knew that the moment to act was near. "Ship ahead!"

Carson looked, and there, so close to them that he could almost hear the frightened voice of the crew, scurried a large, tall-masted trader. She was close—just upon them—but so thick was the fog that he could not make out her name. Her rigging looked like a monstrous spider's web. Her form was a dark-gray shadow against the silver fog.

"Bear down!" shouted Mortimer. His gray eyes were keen for seeing into fogs as well as into hearts, and he was sure that here was a prize. He even could make out the name—the *Baltimore*. She was flying the Stars and Stripes, and was manned by a large crew.

Was it too large? He heard, like faint, elfland talk, a cry go up from the trader deck; some keen pair of eyes had recognized the sinister shape in the fog as that of the *Midnight Mist*, and had given the alarm. Now the crew—what of them that were not working at the sails—had lined up on the after deck to watch, and Mortimer could make an approximate count.

There were nearly twenty of them, but the ship was unarmed; and of what strength were twenty, when forty, each

armed with cutlass and pistol and dagger, were aligned against them? Besides, the pirates were becoming disheartened in their many days of fruitless search, and any kind of a prize would rejuvenate them. What was still more important, here lay a chance to replenish the ship's larder.

"Bear down!" Mortimer called. The helmsman responded at once. Like a wolf, the pirate darted in pursuit. Various of her crew prepared grapnels; the rest were crouching in anticipation. She was so close; surely the chase would last only a few minutes.

The *Baltimore* took the chance of flight. Her crew worked frantically, and every sail was spread for greatest speed. Black Mortimer—and in these northern waters!

The captain of the *Baltimore*, a gray-eyed, gray-haired Virginian, was a valiant man, but he knew the futility of battle with the desperate forty. There were not pistols enough on board to arm his men. Flight was the only chance; his ship was fast and might be able to slip away in the fog. She could if a hundred yards could be gained.

Mortimer discovered soon that the *Baltimore* was swift; she was a clipper, too. But her spread of canvas was not so great as that of the *Midnight Mist*, and her cargo was much heavier. He saw at once, however, that the chase would not be so short as he had hoped. Into the mists they hurried, and for a half hour Mortimer scarcely could notice a change in their relative positions, and she would be a poor target for his scanty cannon in the fog. The rover crept up, but only inch by inch.

But at last the Virginian saw that he was being slowly but steadily overtaken; then his frightened subordinates read their doom in his saddened face.

The fog swept round the *Midnight Mist* like the rotted shrouding of a million embalmed dead. It drenched the sails and in the breadth of the deck ren-

dered the pirates' forms like shadows, blurred and indistinct.

"Now—or never!" Carson breathed. Then he went aft till the fog obscured him from the other rovers, and tapped three times with his pistol butt on the wall of Dorothea's cabin. She started, for this was the signal agreed upon. Then she set her trembling lips and went to work, a member of the guild for vengeance.

Carson waited forty minutes for Dorothea to complete the work—she had started it the day the plan was first conceived—then he approached Mortimer. "This fog'll dampen your powder, cap'n," he said. "Better have the lads reload."

Since the day on the isle, Carson had been a favorite with Mortimer, and he met the suggestion with none of his usual scorn. "Good idea, by the gods! I would never have thought of it—and misfires, with that sturdy crew ahead, would not be pleasant."

"We have time, haven't we, cap'n?" continued Carson. "But we are getting close. If you've got any loaded guns under cover——"

"Yes, there's a supply in the cabin, Southley." Carson had expected just this reply. "Wait!"

Mortimer vanished down the companionway into the cabin. When he emerged, his arms were full of guns. There were pistols with ivory handles, decorated with strange scrolls. There were pistols with gold and silver mountings. These were handsome, shining weapons, but no less deadly than the plain and ugly ones. All were, of course, muzzle-loaders, and all had been the spoil of a hundred plundered ships. The Brethren of the Coast were famous for their love of handsome weapons, so it is not surprising that there were over seventy in the collection. Mortimer could hardly bring them all in a half dozen trips.

Behind Mortimer, in the companion-

way, Carson caught a glimpse of Dorothea. Her lips were set in a little, firm line.

"Pass these out!" Mortimer ordered. He emptied his arms and pocket and belt into the hands of the four men that stood nearest. "Give every man a brace in exchange for his. We don't want any misfires to-day. It is care that has kept us together this long, that won every fight for us, and we can't lose one now through folly." Mortimer chose two of the finest weapons, wiping the barrel of one of them with his handkerchief. "By the gods, that wet fog has crept into my cabin, too! Here's a drop of moisture. But the priming will be dry in them. Pass them out quickly; we'll be alongside yonder merchant in ten minutes more."

Now, Carson, Mortimer, and three others were distributing pistols. Every man except Carson himself exchanged new guns for old. The fog had wet the powder, Carson explained, and at once invented a story—an incident of the wars—where a drenching fog had been the undoing of a whole brigade. One or two of the older tars grumbled, saying fog never did and never would wet priming, but they, too, acceded when they saw the captain was insistent.

"We don't want any misfires to-day," repeated Mortimer.

"But I know that ol' gun o' mine," said Cressley, a bearded ruffian.

"You won't have to draw it, anyway. Those Yankees will not fight; and I doubt that they have anything but corn and jerked venison aboard."

The work done, Mortimer resumed his place on the quarter-deck. Carson stared away into the mist, his face drawn by joyous excitement. It had all gone so smoothly. Was all that he desired almost in sight?

They were quickly overtaking the *Baltimore* now; a few more minutes would find them alongside; but there

was still work to do—quick, sudden, and bold work. He would have to accomplish it alone, without even Dorothea's aid.

The original triumverate in the work of vengeance had become a quartet. Dorothea was with them now. She had been strong-hearted in that last moment, as became the work. She had toiled beside him, and Carson felt a deep glow of satisfaction in the thought.

On through the fog they hurried, the pursued and the pursuer. Now she was hardly a boat length ahead. Now the pirates were on deck with the grapnels, and Munn had the rigging hook ready. They swung up closer, closer; then they saw that the crew of the *Baltimore* had laid no plans for fighting. Apparently they, too, had heard of Mortimer and some of his traditions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN ONE MAN DARES.

NOW the ships swept together, and Munn hurled his hook. It caught in the rigging, and for a moment the two ships strained and tugged and flopped like half-exhausted trout. Then the filibusters caught their grappling hooks over the *Baltimore's* bulwarks. The next instant they had swarmed aboard.

Mortimer appeared at the cabin doorway. A pale-faced girl was huddled on the berth. "Dorothea," he said, half smilingly, "it is time to say good-by."

She faced him resolutely. "What do you mean?" she asked quietly.

"Pack your bag and come out on deck. You are going to have your liberty. I took you from a ship—there is a sort of polite consistency in putting you back on one—now that I am ready to let you go. It has been quite a nice cruise for both of us."

For an instant she looked at him wonderingly. All love of him was gone.

She knew now what a heartless, cold-blooded being he was, but she had tried so hard to awaken a spark of manhood in him, and she had failed. Her sacrifice, her hopes had been in vain. She swept past him out upon the fog-swept deck. He lifted her with exaggerated politeness over the railing and onto the deck of the *Baltimore*.

Meanwhile, the pirates were at work, pillaging the ship. The cargo of food-stuffs was hardly worth taking, but there were little sacks of coins and some good liquors. Besides, Slinger had given orders that the larder be replenished from the next prize, and the rovers were at work at this. They scurried back and forth from deck to deck, their arms loaded. Casks of biscuit, barrels of sugar, sacks of flour—all these were moved.

Meanwhile, Carson had not been idle. "You see the mate?" he whispered to Slinger. "I think he's got something hidden; something rich."

Slinger looked and saw a powerfully built man, whose face portrayed a battle between fear—the result of his helplessness—and fury. He wanted to land his fist in the face of the insolent Mortimer. Slinger thought that Carson had spoken the truth. "There is ways o' making 'im tell us," he replied.

"I'll try a ruse," Carson added. He walked across the deck and rammed the muzzle of his pistol into the mate's breast. "You've got ten minutes to live unless——" began Carson.

"Unless what?" The mate looked at him disdainfully.

"You're a brave man, and I've chosen you," Carson explained hurriedly. "For Heaven's sake don't look curious—look frightened! Shake your head—like you were refusing. I'm Carson and an honest seaman, playing a double game. It is for you to carry it out. Shake your head, confound you, or I'll fire! If you won't do what I want, I'll fire and

get some one else. Not one of our pistols except mine will go off!"

"Is that true?" the mate whispered tensely.

"On my soul! Some of them have soaked powder and some no powder at all, and all the rest have wet priming; a girl doctored 'em in the cabin. I'm playing a double game, I said. How many pistols have you on board?"

"Only six or seven."

"I've got seventy and more on the pirate, all loaded, exchanged for these soaked and empty ones. I'll bring 'em on board, two by two, when I carry stuff over. No, I won't trust you!"

A suspicion had clouded the mate's face; his lips twitched with terror. "But how do I know that's square?" he asked brokenly. "How do I know it isn't a trick—so Mortimer can have some of his devilish sport?"

"It isn't—I stake my life! Are you a coward?"

"No!" He was an American, not a coward.

"Prove it. I don't care if you are a coward, you'll have to do it now. I'll bring over the guns—two by two—and you stay in the cabin. I'll bring 'em to you—two by two—and while I'm getting others you slip them to some one of your crew. Give each man two guns; no one will see you in this fog. Arrange a signal—just 'fight!' is good; have your men flash their guns at once. Take 'em by surprise, and tell your men to shoot at the first jump. Can you trust your men?"

"Yes——"

"But you can't trust yourself. If you fall down in a single detail, if you hesitate or falter"—and Carson looked him squarely in the eyes—"I'll shoot you with my own gun. Both of our lives are at stake and you must not fail. Now start!"

Carson crossed to the rover deck, and the mate, his lips set firmly,

brought his scattered thoughts together as he waited. Now Mortimer had boarded with the girl, and in the security of his position was making a speech. "Hear me, lovers of liberty," he began scornfully. The Americans snarled at him; then their hands sweated in their helplessness. "I see my gallant rovers are finding little of value aboard your skiff, but to show you Robert Mortimer is not vindictive, to reveal to you his good intentions toward humanity, he has a present to deliver." He bowed low to them; then to the girl. "Her name is Dorothea Mortimer——"

There was a deadly silence on the deck. Mortimer saw a murderous rage blaze in the sailors' eyes, and decided to curb his insults. A fight with the twenty mariners would be far from pleasant and might mean death to not a few of his men. "Take her to port with you," he went on, with less cold cruelty in his tone. "And if I hear that any one of you insults her in the slightest degree, I'll chase you into port and hang every dog on board to your own yardarm. Mark my words!"

"You talk to us of insults?" cried a young sailor. "You foul——"

"Tut, tut! Don't provoke me, beardless youth. I took her from a ship and to a ship she goes. But of course you ignorant slubberdegullions could not be expected to see the romance, the poetry of that. You may go into the cabin," he said to Dorothea gently.

There she met the mate and learned how the plot was going. Carson was still working fiercely, with such industry that Mortimer bestowed upon him an approving glance. He was carrying arms full of booty aboard the rover; then hurrying back, apparently for more. Each time he sought out the mate, and in the mist and the fog no one saw what passed from hand to hand. For a full hour the work went

on; then a queer, exultant look began to come upon the faces of the American sailors. One by one they saw a fighting chance, and their common purpose and danger nerved them to make the most of it.

The mate walked among them, and to each he whispered his message of hope. To each shaking hand he delivered what Carson brought. Most of the tars responded at once joyfully; only a few he had to threaten. "I'll shoot you myself if you hesitate or show your cowardice by the twitch of an eyelash," he said to one.

The fog was Carson's greatest ally, except possibly Dorothea. He had worked on in the protection of the fog's mantle, and now the distribution was almost finished. He had not given a thought hardly to his own risk—to the slow and horrid death that he knew awaited him if the plan failed. He worked on and on; only his brilliant eyes told his excitement; only Dorothea read exultation in his pale, drawn face.

At last he finished; the sailors awaited the signal. The pirates failed to notice the tension of their bodies.

Mortimer strolled up and down the deck, his pick across his shoulder. He was thoroughly enjoying himself, even though the haul had not been so rich as he had hoped. It was almost time to go. He looked toward the south; then all at once he came aware that vengeance, sure and patient and inexorable, was hard upon his trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

NO TIME TO TURN.

OUT of the mist swung two mighty ships. They had come up in the fog, as the pirate had come up to the *Baltimore*, and their dim outlines strengthened darkly as they came. Their decks were spotted with cannon and lined with armed marines. The

names on their bows were the *Coventry* and the *Canada*.

Instantly Mortimer was cool and self-possessed. Neither his followers nor the crew of the trader had seen them yet. Apparently the marines had not yet espied the two lashed ships. Mortimer drew a pistol from Munn's belt. He held it in the air, intending to shoot it, and then both of his own.

That signal—three fast shots—was one incorporated in the articles years before. It was to indicate that the pirates were to cover with their pistols the crew of the boarded ship; then back across to their own deck where they would release the hooks and escape. It was the signal of grave danger. It was the command to flee. Mortimer had prepared for all emergencies. Never had he been obliged to use the signal, but he knew that his men would recognize it, and with considerable self-confidence he pressed the trigger. The gun missed fire.

The pirate cocked it again savagely; then snapped it again. He threw it down and jerked out his own pistols. Their hammers snapped harmlessly against the breeching. He screamed an imprecation, for he knew that vengeance was not only on his trail; its inexorable fingers almost had clutched him.

Only Munn and Ferris had seen the motion; the others were too busy or else the fog was too thick between. Both these two hastily leaped the railing—back upon their own deck. There rose a cry from the decks of the frigates; then the mate of the *Baltimore* gave the signal. "Fight!" he bellowed.

Those sailors leaped forward fiercely, their faces contorted with rage and hate. Before they had been like frightened dogs—crouching, afraid to meet the yellow eyes of the pirates. Now their own blazed, their muscles hardened, they sprang up with firm hands gripping their pistols. Each man had

two, and each of them tried to cover two of the rovers.

"At them!" cried Slinger, and he leaped forward, too. But he went upon his face, a last, foul imprecation upon his lips. The mate had fired. Vivano drew a cutlass in a flash of light, but a swifter bullet shattered him to the deck. Cressley had struck with a knife, but the blade was hardly in the air before Carson, from across the deck, had fired with unerring aim; then the knife and its vicious owner dropped together. Some of the rest seized pistols and tugged helplessly upon the triggers. Others stood for a moment inactive, dulled by their sudden peril.

Then came the mate's voice, almost as terrible as the voice of his pistol: "Don't make a move! You're all our prisoners."

But some of them did move. Many of them were cowards in this last analysis, and their spines melted away within them, but some were desperately brave. They rushed, and there upon the deck began a hand-to-hand combat. Pistols were fired; many of those black souls sped away into the fog. There were struggling and the blaze of guns and the flash of knives and the screams of dying men upon that trader deck.

The frigates drew up, their marines shouting encouragement. Some of them were firing with rifles, and their aim was good. But now Mortimer, his stock loose and flying in the wind, the crease of a bullet in the shoulder of his coat, had leaped back aboard the pirate deck. Munn and Ferris had torn loose the grappling hooks. Munn's knife had severed the ropes that fastened them to the *Baltimore's* rigging. The wind caught the sails, and off she drifted. The sails swelled out, and Ferris seized the wheel. Out into the fog with her captain and her crew of two she sped.

From Mortimer's eyes—red and ter-

rible they were—the fight on the *Baltimore's* deck was soon hidden. The fog swept down between, but he knew how it was going. He knew a party of marines had boarded from one of the frigates, the *Coventry*, and the clang of battle quickly had ceased. His band, desperate crew of cutthroats, long flushed and drunk with conquest, with easy living, long inured to all crime and horror, had met their fate at last. He knew they had surrendered.

Himself? Had he, too, met Nemesis? The vessel's sails were bellying and the southerly winds were whisking her away. But on looking behind, Mortimer saw that one of the two ships, the *Canada*, followed. He looked toward the east, and from thence a sinister shadow, like the ghost of a scuttled ship, veered toward him. It headed for a point in advance of him; Mortimer recognized his own wile. Now he saw that it was another frigate.

Shortly, so soon as his captured crew could be safely manacled or else hanged on the yardarm, the *Coventry* would join the chase. In front lay the North and unknown dangers, but he dared not turn. The wind was right for carrying him north, but if he tried to veer, to zigzag into it and thus turn south again, his pursuers would overtake him. They were fleet ships, too, these three.

Besides, but two wretched members of his once dare-devil crew remained. They could sail a ship; not well, perhaps, but fast enough to keep pace with those behind, so long as the wind was favorable. But they could not turn and dodge. His enemies had won at last, and he saw how steadfast had been their purpose; how thorough their methods of vengeance. He saw it all, and now he realized Carson's part in their overthrow. For a moment he howled in rage.

He shook his firm, white fist at the pursuing frigates. He saw fire belch

from the cannon on the decks; they were firing at him now. Their aim was wild, but as always the danger calmed him. Quietly he watched the balls splash into the sea.

Then he straightened his stock and brushed a water drop from his broadcloth coat. "Firing at me now," he said. "Trying to disable my ship. You'd like to see me swinging, you whom I wouldn't speak to if you met me on the street! But you'll never get Black Mortimer alive."

The sounds had carried true to Mortimer; the fight on the deck of the *Baltimore* had ended at the landing of the marines. Almost at once the pirates were overpowered and put in chains; the officers intended to take no chances with their desperate prisoners. Guards were set over them, and the *Baltimore* prepared to resume her journey to London.

The *Coventry* had come up first, and it was her marines that made the attack, at a time when the crew of the *Baltimore* were badly in need of help. Bronson and Mate Belding, once of the *Liverpool*, had watched the fight from the other of the two frigates, the *Canada*, but their assistance had not been needed, so the captain called an order and the ship swung off in the wake of the *Midnight Mist*.

From the west came the *White Heron*, manned by vigorous Americans, eager as foxhounds for the chase. She, too, saw the gray shadow of the pirate, and after him she sped. Now the force of the *Coventry* had been divided; half had been left aboard the trader as a guard for the pirates. Manned by the other half, she, too, swung off northward.

The fog rose slowly; then the gunners on board the frigates began to fire their cannon. But the distance was long and their aim was none too good. The balls shrieked harmlessly away.

"It will be a long, long chase," said Mate Belding.

"But the ice will block him soon," said Bronson hopefully.

"It would seem so; and those few men can't do much with frozen rigging. Surely he can't——"

"You can't count on getting him until you've got him. He may slip out of our hands yet. It looks like he couldn't, for surely we ought to catch him now with these fleet ships, considering he is so short-handed. The wind is just right for him now; if it changes, he is ours. But he may slip out yet——"

"But surely not out of the hand of ice—of death——"

"No, but those aren't our hands. Death wins every one some time, as his black flag indicates. But that isn't *our* victory. Oh, I want to do it myself! I want to see him in these hands of mine."

"I know; but your sister——"

"I doubt if she's alive now. If she is, and the ice gets Mortimer, it will get her, too. But perhaps that would be best."

"Bronson!" The mate turned excitedly. "Didn't you see——"

"No! What?"

"Your sister isn't dead. She isn't on that gray pirate. She's warm and safe on the *Baltimore*, and is right now on her way to London. And I must tell you this——"

"Yes?" Bronson was looking at him dazedly.

"She came out on deck, just after the pirates surrendered, and Carson ran right up to her. When the fog swept 'em out of my sight she was standing—er—he had his arms—they were standing in what I must say was a most significant position."

Bronson looked into Belding's smiling eyes and understood. He laughed his joy.

CHAPTER XX.

TREASURE LOST AND WON.

IN due time the *Baltimore*, with her crew, her marines, her pirates, and her two passengers, Carson and Dorothea, came to port. The word passed quickly among the inns and hostels frequented by sailors, and soon the quay was swarmed. Many of those who gathered had grudges against Black Mortimer and his crew more personal than the hate that all the world felt for the buccaneers, and great voices used to bellowing orders in a storm cheered their delight.

But the cheers abruptly died away when the spectators learned that Black Mortimer was not among the captives. The story quickly circulated that he was fleeing northward, with only two of his old band to work the vessel, and three swift men-of-war in pursuit.

Linked two and two the score or so of pirates—many had died in battle—were led away to prison. Marines walked beside them; the crowds jeered. Some of the spectators lined along the streets, those that had felt their pillaging hands, those that had watched in vain for friends and fathers to come to port, jeered at them with bitter tongues. Some of the rovers spoke back at them, but the rest, with visions of clammy cells and hangmen's nooses, were too blunted and frightened to do anything but dumbly stare. Their capture had been so unexpected. They had been cut off in the height of their power.

They were imprisoned. As British justice moves swiftly, soon they were tried. Some of the more ignorant, the less shrewd, were questioned by clever justices and constables, and by various methods, threats and promises and worse things, they were made to give up, one by one, their secrets. They told the name of the fence; they told the hidden place of treasure; they told of many scuttled ships and confessed

to many murders. All these stories were widely published, and many dim sea mysteries—lost ships, lost treasure, lost lives—were at last explained.

But not one in all that great city read the confessions of Mortimer's pirates with more anxiety and concern than did Godfrey Sands, confidential agent for his highness, Prince Ogle. Each week he searched the columns carefully, in search of the story of the *Rosamond*. He expected any day to read a confession in regard to the theft of diamonds, and he had his bags packed, ready for precipitate flight the moment that he read it. The first flush of excitement in regard to the pirate's capture began to ebb—for such things are soon forgotten—and still not a word was written concerning the necklace. Surely Mortimer had not failed to find it in the leather belt.

The color began to come in Sands' face again. One day he read a list of articles in one cache in the sands of an isle in the West Indies—an account that partially enlightened him. As nearly as Diego, who gave the information could remember, the deposit consisted of gold, silver, inlaid ivory, a few diamonds, and some jewels taken from a traveler whose name he did not know. These were some rubies, a pearl or so, and one famous emerald. No mention was made of the necklace of the rajahs.

"A party will be sent at once to recover this booty," the paper said. "It comprises the spoil from the *Liverpool*, the *York Town*, as well as Spanish, American, and French ships. So far as can be learned, the location of all hidden treasure has been revealed. The pirates all agreed, however, that if the *Midnight Mist*, their notorious ship, is captured, other treasure will be found aboard her."

Sands did not know for what to wish. If the ship were caught and the diamonds found aboard, his duplicity

would be revealed and disgrace would follow. Still, Prince Ogle would regain the stones and probably, since he was a gentle old soul, forgive him. On the other hand, if the necklace were not found, Sands might reach esteemed old age without detection. If Ogle kept his word, that the necklace should remain in his family through posterity, Sands' body might revert to dust before Ogle's descendants learned the truth. He was a bachelor, and would leave no children to bear his disgrace. Ogle was happy in his ignorance, and his lady's necklace, known widely as the rajah's, gave her complete satisfaction.

Sands, the bright-eyed rascal, laughed a little. "What she doesn't know doesn't injure her," he said to nobody in particular, and the expression was afterward famous.

But one incident of the affair did not obtain wide publicity. It was that of Dorothea Bronson, daughter of a Londoner of some importance, who had been captured by Mortimer. The pirates naturally did not mention it. The sailors, in their American chivalry toward women, did not discuss it—even among themselves. Those of the *Liverpool* had never told the fate of their girl passenger—perhaps to spare her, perhaps because their inner manhood had never forgiven them for letting her go without a fight. If any of the journalists heard the story, they did not write of it in their publications.

Carson had come to love Dorothea, and long before the ship came into port a new light had come into her dark eyes. She had been the prey of cruel circumstance. One evening he spoke of what was in his mind, and the glance she gave him in exchange was the happiest thing in all his hard life. His words came in a torrent, and for a while the girl could hardly believe. "And you love me—in spite of it all?" she asked breathlessly.

"I love you and want you more than I ever wanted anything—or ever will want anything," he said.

"And the past is forgotten?"

"Forgotten and dead. There is only happiness ahead—for you and me."

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE LONELY WASTES.

ALL those days, those weeks, went on the chase of the one and the three. Up past the dim banks of Nova Scotia, of Newfoundland, the *Midnight Mist* had fled before the south wind and the pursuing ships. She had no way of turning back. The waters over which she raced were blue and cold. Northward, northward, till the glittering haunches of icebergs began to bejewel the sea. They seemed to Mortimer as monstrous diamonds.

Night would come down soon, for the last days of August had come and northern winter was on the march. The winds would shriek through the rigging in the nights; the ship's lanterns glowed dully, like sad eyes. The winter stars came out, as if the cold blue were strewn with diamonds. Diamonds—Black Mortimer's thoughts turned to them always, and any way he looked he saw them; in the sky, or their mockeries, in the sea.

Mornings would come, with their chill and frost, to find him farther in the North. Few ships he saw now, except those that followed him, and sometimes those, the relentless frigates, were indeed dim. But after days and weeks the relative distance between them and the *Midnight Mist* was hardly changed. The company of three following the rover ship were able to attain her fastest speed; otherwise she might have gained or even escaped. If she did gain, she would lose her headway in a day. Past islands, bare and rock-strewn; past waste lands and flocs and drear peninsulas she went. Strange

white birds wheeled overhead, and once they glided near enough to a shelf of a sunken island to see queer, gawking penguins watching them with beady eyes.

On and on, and never could they turn. Sometimes cold, stinging fog would sweep around them, and in the mornings ice would clink and tinkle in the rigging. The days grew short and cold till only for a meager hour or so in the afternoon would the sun give its heat with a free hand. Then the night would fall quickly, with its shadows sinister, and Mortimer and his silent two would watch with despairing, hard eyes.

Never did the wind shift appreciatively, and at first they hardly touched the sails. Later, when they saw that the frigates kept pace, they worked them desperately, but still they could not gain. Perhaps because neither Munn nor Ferris was an expert helmsman.

The sea was a vast place—cold in death. Not a ship watched the rover vessel pass; her only companions were those that chased her. They passed islands, yellow and barren. They passed great fields and shelves of ice. They swept into Davis Straits, and winter, with cold but infolding arms, met them there.

It was September now; to the south the leaves were falling. Here, on the bleak stretches that they scurried by, there were no leaves to fall. There were open, desolate wastes and rockstrewn, lonely shores of ice.

Winter met them, and snow sifted into the sea. It wafted down upon the rover deck and quickly covered it with gentle white. The flakes fell faster till the three lonely men looked as shadows to each other. They headed straight into the storm, for where else might they go?

"Maybe they'll turn back soon," said Munn one night.

"Maybe. We can't go on much farther," whispered Ferris.

"This is nothing," affirmed Mortimer. "In my old days I would stand this much discomfort for a good morning's shooting, and surely life is worth more than a bag of game."

"We're going to be the bag o' game," Munn said, disheartened utterly.

"It is outlandish weather," went on Mortimer, "but our friends behind us there"—he motioned superciliously with his arm—"must not like it, either. But of course they have the advantage over us. They are having a good morning's shooting."

He even laughed a little when a ball splashed into the sea at their port side. The gunners on the frigates bombarded them almost daily.

"Too close to laugh at," growled Ferris.

"You are not obliged to laugh, I am sure," said Mortimer; "but I can't expect a dog like you to see anything but the solemn side of this little life."

"Dog, eh?" Ferris scowled. "You know what I've a notion to be a-doin'?"

"I'm sure I don't know—or care."

"Take this ship back and give up. I'd as lief dance on air as freeze to death up here."

"Hopelessly without pride——" began Mortimer cheerfully.

Munn interrupted him: "And so would I?"

"Am I to understand"—Mortimer looked at them with utter contempt—"that this is mutiny?"

Ferris grew bold now that Munn had championed him. "Yes, by——" he began.

"Don't swear; it pains me," Mortimer interrupted. "This is the way I treat mutineers!" His fists shot out. Munn dodged, but the captain's right caught Ferris in the face. He rolled upon the deck. As he picked himself up, Mortimer flicked an imaginary speck from his broadcloth coat.

"We'll stick it out with you," said Munn, with animal admiration.

"Naturally. Ah, I can't say I like this snow."

Blindly into the north they drove, without fear of striking other craft. Except perhaps for Eskimo oomiaks that crawled along the ice ledges, no other craft was there. The blocks of ice loomed large enough to see even in the snow flurry.

Far into Davis Straits they went, and the temperature fell steadily. Before the cold had been only stinging; now it was a numbing, blasting cold. It hurt to breathe the ice-laden air. The fingers stiffened quickly. The islands that they passed were white with drifts.

Still the frigates followed. The marines fired their cannon sometimes fitfully, but often the snows obscured their target. Besides, the *Midnight Mist* seemed in the influence of a potent charm. The balls splashed behind her and beside her and in front of her, but as yet she was unsplintered. Bronson and Mate Belding stood upon the cold deck, and with cold hands helped the sailors tug at the stinging ropes, but hate and the determination to avenge kept their hearts warm.

"We can't go on much farther," said the captain of the *Coventry*.

"We'll freeze to death up here. We'd better turn back," said the mate of the *White Heron*.

"A few days more," predicted the marines on the *Canada*.

All the ship captains were under orders—to bring back Black Mortimer if such a thing were possible. "Chase him till you get him or till you can chase no more," had been the instructions. Besides, they thought that treasure would be found in the hold of the gray ship, and this was an added inducement. Lastly there were Bronson and Mate Belding of the *Liverpool*, the ardor of whom was contagious.

CHAPTER XXII.

• AMID ICE AND SHADOW.

MORE days and more nights passed, and the cold was more bitter every hour. The icebergs loomed everywhere, so that Ferris had to stay all day at the helm. He could not lash it now. All night, beneath the frigid, insolent stars, Munn guided the ship. A can of grog stood ever near him; he drank of it often and more often; his eyes bleared, but with its fire in his blood he fought off death by cold.

These two—Ferris and Munn—snatched what sleep they could in the forecabin. Mortimer, as ever, occupied the cabin alone. He still drank his cold wines and still ate alone of his half-frozen food. Still he dressed with care and nicety, although the frost pierced his fashionable clothes with a thousand daggers. To his two subordinates he was cold and contemptuous as ever. Munn respected him for it; Ferris, an arrant coward, but possessing a sort of diseased self-respect, hated him. Ferris had wanted to share his cabin, and Mortimer had threatened to hang him for his insolence. Ferris had resented the epithet of "dog" and was knocked prone upon the deck for it. Both of which stories he took to Munn.

"What ye want to bunk in the cabin for, anyway?" demanded Munn. "It's colder 'en in the fo'c's'le, and if Captain Mortimer wasn't such a gentleman, he'd come and stay with us. And dog? Ain't ye a dog? And ain't I? Ain't we two black scoundrels that would be swung the minute we step foot on dry land? And who's got a better right than 'im to call you one?"

There was no gainsaying this common sense.

On and on they went, and the days became a short space of light wherein the sun crept but a little way up the southern sky. At midday the pirates'

shadows were long and grotesque upon the snow of the deck. The cold did not unbend its chill and clutching fingers before the sickly beams. The chase was surely all but over.

Now there were new sights and new sounds. Across the north at night—and night was most of the time—stretched fiery bands. The sky was full of an eerie glow, which poured down and tinted all the drifts as if Black Mortimer had plied here once and drenched them all with blood. There came flashes that illumined all that waste of ice and barren sea and rocky ledge; intermittent streaks of many-colored flame, explosive stars like monstrous diamonds; this was the aurora borealis. Baffin Bay—and ice and cold and death loomed ahead.

The ice floes were congealing all about them; the air was charged full of the sound. But this was better than the eternal silence. "We can't go on much farther," said Munn to Ferris.

"It's the last day or two for us," said the warmly wrapped officers of the men-of-war.

Another day, and the ice floes were nearer them. The *Midnight Mist* crept along between the icebergs; any instant she might strike the ledge of them beneath the sea. All about was only ice and shadow, and the only light was that of the weird aurora.

Then Ferris noticed that his captain's face was lined and anxious. He did not know why, but soon he learned. Apparently the ice floes had met in front, and the *Midnight Mist* was trapped at last. There seemed no passage through them; then Mortimer looked queerly at his pistols. Munn remembered at once what he had heard his captain promise at the beginning of the chase: "You will never get Black Mortimer alive."

Now they drew near the floe, and all at once Mortimer cheered. There was a narrow channel left where the

ice had not yet congealed; but the icebergs were bumping and surging about within it like live things, and it seemed certain destruction to attempt to enter. "Steer her through," called Mortimer.

"Aye, sir," responded Munn.

The *Midnight Mist* leaped on. She glided between the bergs like a frightened rabbit as Mortimer, from the bow, directed Munn. Once it seemed that two great blocks of ice would crush her, but they shocked above the masts and crunched, and the little ship raced on between.

Mortimer was still smiling, but the evil faces of Munn and Ferris were white and drawn when they came out upon the open water. They looked behind, and saw that the gap through which they had passed was slowly closing up. The great fields of ice were merging, merging; the shock of bergs filled the frosty air. They saw the blocks pile up as the shelves met. And now they saw that the chase was ended. The three frigates could not follow; even now they were heading back to bear the story.

But now the wind was dying, and the sails lagged. Lazily, lazily drifted the ship; then the pirates saw that they were upon a little sea, like a sapphire set in silver. Diamonds, sapphires—Mortimer could not keep his thoughts away from the matter of jewels.

Ahead and behind and all about them was a barricade of ice. It was crunching, grinding, and, to Munn's feverish eyes, seemed drawing nearer.

"They've got us now," said Ferris.

"Who?" asked Mortimer quietly.

"We've beat them again, my mates."

"Beat 'em—we'll never get out of here——"

"Oh, yes, we will, and by a quick route, too. Much swifter and much better than a long journey back to the gallows. Now let me alone. I am going to my cabin."

Those two men watched him turn

and go, and out of their frost-filled eyes they saw that his step was dragging. Then they looked at each other, and quickly looked apart. For on each other's face they read the realization that death—that omnipotent king—had summoned them, and each was afraid to go.

The ice drew slowly up; the two men watched it dumbly. It was as inevitable as death itself. The cold was terrible now; they swung their arms to keep them from freezing. Ferris tried to pray, but at first he only whispered hoarsely and made abortive noises in his throat. His frosty beard would not let the words come out.

Aurora and cold and crunching ice and gleaming water and death in the offing; stars soon to visit; icy rigging and icy fingers and slow hearts; there were the conditions that faced them. The rum was cold to their teeth, and only a convulsive shudder, not warmth, followed when they poured it down their throats. They tried to keep warm with extra coats, but the blasting cold would not be driven off. Now the little space in which they rode was only a pond between the floes.

"Will they crush the boat?" whispered Ferris.

"Likely. If they hit her right, maybe they'll only raise her up. But the snow will cover her and we'll die anyway."

"I dread death o' cold!"

"Better nor a rope. You get warm just before you go. We're done for, mate."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE GLITTERING STARLIGHT.

IN his frosty, lonely, shadowy cabin sat Black Mortimer with his thoughts. Through the porthole he looked out on an icy world. He knew now—he had known for many hours—that only his black and wizened soul could escape from the ice fields. He knew that his little time of strife and

crime and villainy was over; a Master Destiny was about to speed away his own soul. He tried to warm his shivering body with wine.

The stars came out—for the clouds had passed—and looked down at him through the porthole. Strings of jewels they seemed, in endless festoon about the heavens. They were too far off for him to gather, but in his bold days he had gleaned some just as lustrous.

But his thoughts were not clear now; they kept straying off as those of one at the verge of sleep. He tried to bring them together into channels of sense, but that made him tired. Always they escaped him again. Queer thoughts he had that day; and, after a while, the stillness made him afraid.

Memories came thronging, and but few of them were pleasant. They were clear—clearer than his thought—and now scarcely could he distinguish memory from reality. The ice was thronged with shapes he knew and dreaded. There were faces that he had seen grotesquely drawn by sudden death. How many had been his blows! It seemed to him that he remembered every one. They whipped their batlike wings above him—a hideous legion of harpies. No—that was only a dream, a fancy. Blow on blow—their numbers appalled him.

He remembered the sport that he had at sundry times. He remembered unpleasant noises—supplications and screams and pleadings. The ice about him made just such sounds. Shadowy shapes—of course he only imagined them; surely they were fancies—came up one by one to eye him. But they seemed most real. Faster and faster they came—all accusing, all horrible.

There was Brock, the mechanic. Why had he felled Brock? One of his own crew; why was it? He could not remember now. There was the great, bearded seaman who had ob-

jected to the articles. There were those that had fallen in duels—white-faced brothers and white-headed fathers. The snow, in his blurred vision, looked like an old man's white hairs. There were scores of others. Mortimer wondered, now he was fighting so hard to live, and breathing so fast to keep away the cold, why other lives had always seemed so cheap to him. He wondered if those other lives had feared death as now he feared it. Darkness was about.

Then he saw Dorothea. She floated up and looked at him, near, near—just through the porthole. He turned his eyes away, and she was in the room with him. Her eyes were so sad and so wide. Her flesh was so white. He covered his face with his hands, but she drifted through his fingers. He pleaded with her. "Go away," he cried. "Torture me no more."

She seemed to be trying to talk to him, and at first he could not understand. "It is only your stern way sometimes, isn't it?" she seemed to say. "You do love me. Tell me that you do."

His throat caught when he tried to answer, and only a sob came. He looked up then, but she was drifting off.

Darkness and cold and fear; he dreaded them every one. Worse, the master behind them all was death, imperial death. It wore a crown. So near it was—so near.

He could not see clearly now; his eyelashes were freezing. His eyes were too nearly closed to look those whispering phantoms in the face.

His life was trailing off swiftly now, and he was afraid to step into the Shadow. What would he have to show or tell to pay his way along? He had always fought his way before, but now his arms were too stiff and weak to wield a pick. He tried to think, but the creeping spirit of death stole thought

by thought away from him. His whole life—so short, too—and nothing gained!

But there was booty on board ship—rich things—and this he had to show. Best of all, he had the wonderful necklace; would not that buy his way among the shades? Each stone was as beautiful as one of the forbidding stars. Death was close, stealing his thoughts one by one, but he remembered the necklace. He even remembered, half-way, where he had left it. He rose with closed eyes and outstretched arms.

"No use any more," said Ferris, like a drunken man. "No use. Besides, I can't stand the cold."

But Munn, huddled with him in the fore-castle, was not listening.

"Might as well do it a quick way," he went on. "Before hands get too stiff. No—not quite—not quite. All over soon—"

Munn had not listened to his talk, but what he heard now made him turn his head. The hands of Ferris had not been too numb to hold a pistol, and a soul had whimpered away into the dark. Munn was all alone, and the darkness crept in past the lantern. He grew afraid.

The ship was rising now—borne up by the ice floes from below. It rocked crazily. Munn rose, and, staggering, made his way along the deck to the cabin. He could not bear the solitude. "Cap'n," he called from without.

No one answered. Munn tried to open his frosted eyes. "Cap'n—Mortimer. Ferris is dead, and I'm alone."

There was no reply; then the darkness seemed to deepen. Munn pushed his way into the cabin. The starlight showed him all.

Black Mortimer was dead upon the floor, and from the nature of his hurt it seemed as if his own avenging pick had risen and struck him down.

Tale of Toby Lyons, Ex-Ball Tossers

A Tip from Over There

By
Frank X. Finnegan



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

SURPRISING INFORMATION.

HAVING finished his second cigar since luncheon and waded through the morning paper as far as the building permits and business chances on the twelfth page, Toby Lyons took his feet off the desk and was contemplating a stroll in the balmy sunshine when the door of his office slowly began to open.

A second later, a scared face, surmounted by an old-fashioned hat, peered around the edge of the door at him, and, after a survey of the detective and the office furniture, a little old man slipped in and carefully closed the door behind him. He tiptoed to the desk, wide-eyed and timorous, and nodded to the solemn-visaged occupant. "Am I meetin' Mr. Lyons?" he inquired.

"You sure are," Toby replied. "What can I do for you mostly?"

"It's a detective agency you have—am I right?" the little man continued.

"Nothin' else," Lyons assured him. "You must have been readin' that twelve dollars' worth o' gold letterin'

on the door. Take a chair and tell me about it."

The visitor eased himself into a chair beside the desk, rubbed his hands together nervously for a minute while he studied Toby with staring eyes, and then drew out a card which he laid before the sleuth.

"My name is Crofton—Michael Crofton," he said. "Maybe you know my place at Sierra Vista, on the way out to Pasadena. 'Tis p'inted out be th' sthreet-car min to visitors sometimes—th' grandest home in southern California, if it's meself that says it! I have orange groves—a sunken garden—a big white house on th' hill—a chicken ranch with four hundhred lay-in' hens on it—everything man could want, Misther Lyons."

Toby nodded. "I know it like my own desk," he said. "It's just the sort o' place I'm figurin' on havin' when I get ready to quit and watch the hens gettin' rich at seventy cents a dozen for eggs."

Crofton listened with his head on one side like a speculative bird while he plucked at his white beard with nervous fingers. "I'm glad you do,"

he said. "Knowin' that I built up such a property afther landin' in California with twinty dollars in my pocket an' not a pick or shovel to my name, you're not likely to think I'm what the byes call daffy, are you now?"

"Not so the coppers ought to be tipped off about it," Mr. Lyons assured him. "You look to me like a pretty level-headed party, Mr. Crofton. Has somebody been spreadin' the glad news that you're going dip?"

"No, no! 'Tisn't that at all!" the worried caller exclaimed. "No one has been talkin' about me. But the fact is—well, to knock fifty words into one, it's gettin' so that I'm not sure o' me-self!"

Toby sat back and studied him closely. There was nothing about the mild blue eyes, unless it was their furtive expression of fright, to suggest any mental trouble. He was very evidently nervous and worried, but beyond that the detective's scrutiny failed to develop any serious symptoms. "Well, I got to hand it to you for gettin' onto yourself, if you are beginnin' to get squirrely," he said. "Most of 'em has to have a net thrown over 'em and be tossed into the wagon before they suspect anything is wrong in the wheelhouse. Where did you get this idea that you're headed for the gratin's?"

"There's just wan thing that's got me worried," the old man said, "and whin I tell you what it is you'll see that I need the help of a brave man like yerself; a man that'll stick at nothin' to find out the truth, an' that's got nerves of iron."

Mr. Lyons dusted his coat lapel complacently. "I hate to boost myself, Mr. Crofton," he said, "but it looks like somebody has been tippin' me off to you right. You got my battin' average right out o' the official dope book, believe me. But, leavin' this kiddin' stuff out of it, let's get down to this here trouble o' yours. What's the matter?"

Crofton squared himself for the revelation he was about to make. He clasped his hands on Toby's desk and leaned toward him impressively. "Well, sir, at home in Ireland there was a towny o' mine, Dan Casey, that was closer to me than my own brother," he said. "Byes an' min, we were as thick as thieves until I came out to America an' left him behind me. Poor Dan! He's been dead an' gone these twinty years, Heaven have mercy on him!"

He moved his chair nervously a few inches closer to Toby's desk. "Whisper!" he said. "Dan Casey's been comin' back th' last three months."

CHAPTER II.

A VOICE FROM THE SHADOWS.

EVEN the imperturbable Mr. Lyons started a bit at this unexpected announcement. The look he turned on his visitor was sharper than before, and he began to wonder whether Michael Crofton was not correct in his own diagnosis of the situation. "Comin' back?" he repeated. "How do you mean that?"

"For th' last three months," the old man declared with positiveness, "on the night o' th' eighteenth, at twelve o'clock, I've seen Dan Casey risin' up out o' nothin' in my bedroom! I've seen him, I tell ye, and he's spoken to me! Be word o' mouth I know 'tis Dan, f'r he called me by name!"

He dropped back into his chair, twiddling his wrinkled fingers nervously and staring at Lyons to read the effect of his announcement.

"Well, this here game begins to look serious," Toby admitted. "It ain't so bad if somebody takes a whirl back from the other shore once in a feller's lifetime—like Thanksgivin' night after he's ate a big dinner, or somethin' like that. But when they make a habit of it, I can see where it's likely to snare your goat right."

"A-a-a-h! Ye sthruck it there, Mither Lyons; ye sthruck it there!" the little man said. "Think av th' months sthretchin' away ahead o' me, to th' end o' me days, an' Dan Casey appearin' to me on th' eighteenth o' every wan av thim! 'Tis enough t' take th' heart an' sowl out of a man. 'Tis so!"

"Nothin' less," Lyons admitted. "But where do you figure to cut me in on this, Mr. Crofton?"

"I'm comin' to that in a minute," Crofton returned. "Leave us get th' sthraight av th' thing first. I've been a widower f'r near fifteen years—an' I'm to be married ag'in in six weeks' time."

"That sort o' tangles things worse than ever, don't it?" Toby suggested. "It's bad enough for your old pal to come botherin' around you, but I can see where the second Mrs. Crofton wouldn't be keen for havin' him drop in for a chat on the eighteenth of every month."

Crofton moistened his lips and tugged at his wisp of beard as he pondered this thought. "She wouldn't," he said, "nor would I, what's more. But here's th' thing that's throublin' me most, Mither Lyons. Not only is Casey appearin' to me as reg'lar as th' full o' th' moon, but he's warnin' me agin' gettin' married! Wherever Dan is, he knows what's goin' on, mind ye! He has an eye on me like he did in th' old days whin we were knockin' around th' sthreets o' Limerick together an', bad scrán to him, he was always right, Dan was! Whin I followed th' coorse he p'inted f'r me, I came out on top; an' whin I didn't, like as not I got me head cracked with a peeler's fist an' found meself in timbo whin I woke up."

"How do you mean he's warnin' you?" Toby asked.

"I'm tellin' ye, man dear, what happened to me," Crofton said, a bit testily. "'Twas six months ago, or the like o' that, I met Mrs. Benedict—the

—ah—th' lady I intind to marry. She's a widow woman, Mither Lyons—th' most cha-a-armin' av her cha-a-a-arm-in' sex, as th' pote says. We were attracted to wan another fr'm th' hour we met."

"Lemme ask you one thing," Lyons interrupted: "This lady—she had a slant over them grounds o' yours out there at Sierra Vista the first time you met, didn't she?"

"'Twas in th' sunken garden we were inthrojuced be a muchool friend," the old man returned, stroking his beard gently as he pondered an instant on that tender recollection. "An old neighbor o' mine, thinkin' prob'ly that I must be lonesome, got up a little party for me birthday."

"And after that?" Lyons suggested, as Crofton seemed likely to drift into dreamland.

"Well, we met ag'in several times, although I'm no soci'ty man at all," he went on, "an' in a few weeks we were engaged. Th' weddin' is set f'r th' end o' June. In six weeks' time, barrin' accidents, I'll be th' happiest man in California."

"Barrin' accidents?" the detective repeated. "You mean—Casey?"

"Man alive, what could I mean?" the little man retorted. "Av coorse 'tis him I'm referrin' to. 'Twas only a month afther our bein' engaged that Dan first come back—on th' eighteenth o' February. I'll not forget th' date. I was waked up by somethin' at twelve o'clock—I felt a cold breeze blowin' through me room. 'Twas not like an open window, mind ye, Mither Lyons, but differentlike. I dunno's I can make ye undherstand."

"I'm gettin' you fine," Toby said. "Go on an' pitch."

"I lay there, wondherin' what was th' matther av me," Mr. Crofton continued, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, "an' thin, all of a sudden, I see a light begin to shine on th' wall,

away over in th' far corner. Thinks I first: 'Don't be an *ohnshugh*, Michael Crofton. 'Tis th' headlight av an auto down th' road, shinin' through th' window.' But it kept on growin' an' growin', gettin' brighter an' bigger."

He stretched an impressive hand to the sleuth and tapped him on the arm as he said slowly: "An' thin I saw Dan Casey. He seemed to grow out o' the light from nothin', until he stood before me, wan hand in his pocket an' his bit av a hat on th' back av his head—just as he looked in the picture he sent me from home that I've looked at hundhreds av times. I thought I was dhreamin'. I was sure of it—until Dan spoke to me."

"He spoke to you?" Toby repeated.

"As sure as I'm sittin' in this chair. I tell ye. He says: 'Michael, don't marry this woman. Don't do it.' An' with that he faded away until there was nothin' there but black darkness an' me dhroppin' back on th' pillow like a dead man."

They sat silent for a minute or two. Toby stirred uneasily. There was a certainty about the old man's manner that he found it difficult to reconcile with his fantastic narrative. "And do you mean to tell me that this same thing happened on the eighteenth of the next month?" he asked then.

"The same thing—at the same hour," Crofton replied. "An' on the eighteenth of April he come ag'in with his message, never changin' a hair. Now you know why I've come to you, Mis-ther Lyons. I want th' help av a brave man. Next Friday is th' eighteenth o' May."

CHAPTER III.

ALONE WITH A MYSTERY.

AT eleven o'clock on the Friday evening following, Toby Lyons and his friend Bud Madigan descended from an interurban trolley car at Sierra Vista and strolled leisurely toward the

imposing home of Michael Crofton. They were engaged upon a mission of business, for Toby had undertaken the task of "laying the ghost" that had disturbed Mr. Crofton's mature dreams of connubial bliss.

Madigan had declared himself in as soon as he heard the project. "I only got one thing to say, Bud," Toby observed, as they walked up an avenue of orange trees. "I won't hold it in against you if you want to pull out now and beat it back to the city. You know how I feel about this here business—that there's nothin' to it one man can't tackle alone—and you may be thinkin' you signed up in too much of a hurry or somethin' like that."

"What's that? Say, when I begin quitting on you, it won't be just when you're going to play ball," Bud retorted. "I'll try to give you five days' notice, anyhow. You come along and trot out your ghost and see if I don't stick around as long as you do!"

Lyons chuckled his appreciation of this attitude. "I thought I could get your animal if I went out after it," he said. "I didn't exactly expect you to leave me flat, Bud, but I didn't want you to feel that I was figurin' on cuttin' into any rough stuff up here at Crofton's. Either the old boy is goin' dip and really thinks he sees and hears all these things or there's somethin' queer comin' off here. Whichever it is, we'll soon know."

"Is the old man going to be with us?" Madigan asked.

"Him? Not so's you could notice it!" Toby said. "We'd have to both get a toehold on him to drag him into that bedroom again on the night o' the eighteenth until we've sat in on this here séance and told him what's doin'. He's ready to quit right now and sell out his whole place if this business keeps on."

"But he isn't ready to give up the widow," Bud suggested.

"I don't know about that. He's been

so used to trailin' his bets with his old pal Casey and winnin' out, he might take Dan's tip on this stuff and pass up this new battery partner if it got to him strong enough. That's why he's so keen for havin' the thing settled before it's time for weddin' bells to jingle.

"I'd hate to crab Mrs. Benedict's game," Lyons added, as he looked up at the imposing white chalet they were approaching, "because she certainly is framin' to marry a swell lot o' real estate, and a family ghost might make things uncomfortable."

Crofton met them just outside the door of the big house. He had been waiting in the shadows to intercept the detective. "Ye're on time, I see," he began nervously. "I've got every wan out o' the way——"

He spied the tall figure of Madigan and stopped, looking at Lyons inquiringly. "My partner," Toby explained. "I figured it might make things stronger if I had a witness along. Shake hands with Mr. Madigan."

The old man took Bud's capable hand reluctantly, peering into his face as he did so. "Partner, eh?" he said. "I thought we were to keep this thing to ourselves, Misther Lyons?"

"That's all right, so far's you're concerned," the detective replied. "There's no need o' you spillin' it all around the place, but I got to go in there and wait for somethin' to happen. You never can tell what it's goin' to be, and I'd like to have somebody sittin' by to ease my dyin' moments if that's what's ahead o' me."

"Whisht! Don't talk that way!" Crofton muttered. "I'm not feelin' any too well to-night. Don't be puttin' ideas like that into me head."

"It might as well be now as any time, Mr. Crofton," Bud said. "He's a tough old crab, but I suppose his finish has to come some day, and, when it does, I want to be there to hold his hand."

"Spoken like a true pal," Toby re-

turned, nudging Madigan for silence as he saw the old man looking at them as if he had a dawning suspicion that he was being hoaxed by the pair. "Now, how about this? Do we go right up to your room?"

"Yes. Come right along," Crofton said. "The servants are all in another bungalow. I keep Japanese help, an' they don't live in th' house with me. You'll have everything to yerselves. I told my butler I'd have a fri'nd here to-night, so he won't bother ye."

"You don't care to sit in with us?" Toby suggested.

Crofton turned quickly, his fingers in his beard. "No, no! I'm a bit upset to-night, bein' that it's the eighteenth," he said. "I'll be goin' to town on th' eleven-twinty car. I'm goin' to stay at the Hayward, if ye should want me for anything. I'll show ye th' room now an' leave ye in charge o' things."

He led the way to a chamber on the second floor of the splendidly furnished home, situated at the front of the house, over the big living room. Almost as soon as he had ushered them in, the fussy little man bowed himself out, and a few minutes later they heard the outer door close behind him. They were alone with the mystery.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE WITCHING HOUR.

WHAT do you make of him?" Toby asked, when they had settled themselves comfortably in big easy-chairs to await developments.

"He seems to be as sane as any of us," Madigan replied. "He's more nervous than is good for him, but who wouldn't be, after passing through what he has?"

"You figure he's passed through something, then?"

"Don't you?" Bud asked.

"Well, since you put it to me flat, I'm willin' to admit I don't know what to

think," Toby said. "But, seein' that these here mysterious doin's are always pulled off at midnight, and we only got about twenty minutes to go until then, we'd better take a slant around here and see if we can locate a plant."

"That's the eye!" Bud exclaimed, springing up with alacrity. "If there's any sort of a game rigged up, we ought to have a look while the lights are on."

They walked around the room, examining it and its furniture carefully as they proceeded. But they found only the bed, the dresser, the chairs, and a couple of tables—the ordinary furnishings of a bedchamber, and nothing that aroused suspicion through its appearance.

The room was spacious, being nearly twenty feet square, and its walls were broken by three doorways and the two windows that looked upon the lawn. One of the doors was that through which they had entered; a second, when Toby turned the knob, opened into an adjoining bedroom; and the third door was that of a clothes closet.

By the time they had completed their investigations, it lacked only ten minutes of midnight—the witching hour when something might be expected to happen. Toby dropped into a chair and lighted a cigar. "Have a smoke," he suggested, extending one to Madigan. "We might as well be comfortable while we're waitin' for Casey."

"Maybe Dan doesn't like smoke," Bud observed, as he accepted the cigar and struck a match.

"Well, it'll make old Crofton's room smell like there was a man around, anyhow," Lyons returned. "I s'pose we ought to switch off the light and give the spooks a chance. They don't never show unless it's dark."

Bud laughed nervously and reached for the switch on the wall near his chair. "It's five minutes to twelve," he said, glancing at his watch. "Well, here goes for whatever may happen."

He pushed the switch button, and the room was plunged into darkness save for the glowing tips of their cigars. For a minute they sat in silence, staring about at the dim outlines of the furniture and expecting they knew not what. Madigan stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Gettin' nervous, Bud?" Toby whispered.

"Dry up!" he retorted fiercely, in the same suppressed tone. "Let's play the game according to the rules."

A few more minutes of silence, and then a deep-toned bell far off began tolling midnight. At the third stroke Toby suddenly found his arm clutched by Madigan, who pointed at the space between the front windows and whispered sharply into his ear: "Look! Look! What's that?"

Lyons sat forward on the edge of his chair, staring unbelievably in the direction Bud was indicating with a trembling hand. A patch of light, nebulous and wavering, had made its appearance between them and the wall. Slowly it grew in intensity, and as they gazed, spellbound and silent, the outlines of a man's figure began to develop in the midst of it—a man dressed in rough tweeds, one hand thrust into a trousers pocket and a soft hat set jauntily on the back of his head.

As the strange, mysterious light grew strong enough to show his face and eyes, they saw that he was of a lugubrious cast of features, and he seemed to look out at them sadly.

"Well, of all the——" Toby began, starting to rise.

Madigan's grasp held him in his chair. He felt Bud's panting breath on his cheek. "No, no! Wait!"

The words were breathed into his ear with an excitement in keeping with his own. A current of air suddenly was wafted through the room, as if a door had been opened. They did not move, held by the glowing apparition

that appeared to gaze at them reprovingly.

Then they heard the voice Crofton had heard—a voice filled with a melancholy that matched the features they were staring at: "Michael, don't marry this woman. Don't do it."

The words came slowly and distinctly. The light began to fade. The figure lost some of its clear outlines, as though it were retreating into the shadows. But before they fully realized this, Toby and Madigan were startled into action by another voice—one that sounded behind them in a long-drawn cry that was half a moan. "Ah-h-h-h!" it wailed in terror.

Together they turned, to see that the door to the adjoining chamber was open and a man, bareheaded and in white garments, was swiftly threading his way among the pieces of furniture in mad flight.

"Get him!" Toby shouted, and, with a simultaneous leap, they were in pursuit.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE DARK.

BUD was the first to reach the door of communication between the rooms; and Lyons, assuming that all of the chambers opened upon the hall, rushed out through the door by which they had entered with Crofton, instead of following his companion.

His guess was a good one. As he reached the hall, the fleeing figure emerged from a bathroom at the head of the stairs and started for the lower floor with flying feet. Toby would have to traverse ten feet of the hallway to reach the stair landing and make the turn to descend. Instead, he swung over the handrail beside him and dropped.

He almost landed on the fugitive. The man was only a few feet ahead of him when he straightened up, and with a few quick strides Toby over-

hauled him as he dodged around the dining-room table, gasping in terror. Bud came rushing down the stairs, a pocket flash light in his hand, just as the detective threw his conquering arms around the man they sought.

"I've got him!" he said. "Hunt the switch, Bud. Let's have some light here."

The next moment the room was flooded with light, and Lyons found in his grasp a trembling Japanese, who slipped to the floor on his knees and clasped Toby's legs in an excess of terror as he begged for mercy.

"Get up here!" Lyons ordered, hauling him to his feet. "What's the idea o' this? Who are you?"

The fellow was in pajamas and wore slippers on his stockingless feet, as though he had crept out of bed a few minutes before. He blinked at his captors in terror, and it was some minutes before he was able to speak. "I am Yoshu," he whimpered. "I am butler of Mister Crofton. Please not kill Yoshu. I not like to die, please."

"What were you doing upstairs, there?" Toby demanded, without releasing his hold.

At the mention of the upper room, Yoshu's terror increased. His eyes rolled, and he fell against the detective limply. "I not know what is up there," he whispered. "I see him come in the dark, yes. You see, please? Him dead man, Mist' Crofton tell me often, oh, yes! I not want to see that, oh, no!"

"Look here, Yoshu," Toby said, "nobody's going to hurt you if you tell us the straight o' this. How did you come to be up in that bedroom when you ought to be out in your own bungalow with the other Japs? Come through, now! I want to know about this."

For a few minutes more the butler struggled against the terror that beset him; but at length he managed to stammer out a halting story. It was his curiosity that had got him into trouble.

he explained. His employer had instructed him to go to bed in his own quarters as usual and pay no attention to the persons who would be in Mr. Crofton's room for the night; but he had been so curious about this unprecedented occurrence that he had hidden near and listened to most of the conversation before Crofton left the house.

Later he had prepared to retire and then crept up to the spare bedroom to reconnoiter. He had opened the door just in time to see the ghostly visitation that had sent him flying and that he recognized from the photograph Mr. Crofton kept on his desk in the library.

The combination of that unearthly spectacle and his pursuit in the dark by two strangers had led him to expect nothing less than immediate execution at their hands.

Toby listened to the halting and disjointed story in silence and accepted it at its face value. "You beat it to bed, Yoshu," he said, "and keep your mouth shut about what you seen here. Understand? If we want you later, we can get you. But no talk goes. On your way, now!"

The trembling butler slipped away into the darkness through a side door, and Lyons, switching off the light, led the way upstairs. "Maybe he's giving it to us right, Bud, and maybe he isn't," he said. "I don't trust them fellows when my back is turned on 'em."

"I feel better since we got that bird," Madigan said. "He's in it, some way or another. I was beginning to wonder whether my own block was screwed on straight or not."

Toby did not reply. When they reached Crofton's chamber, he switched on the lights, and they looked around with careful scrutiny. Nothing was changed except for the disturbance of the chairs caused by their hasty exit. The detective walked slowly to the spot between the windows where they had seen the startling vision. A table of

some dark, polished wood stood there, close to the wall. "Well, old scout, everything seems to look natural," he began. "There's the bed and the chairs, just where we left 'em, and here's this table right in front——"

He struck the table with his hand and stopped suddenly, staring from its polished surface to the wall, where Dan Casey had appeared to them. Madigan had parted the curtains, and was looking out into the night. For a few minutes Lyons stood staring down at the table and its surroundings and passing his fingers over it appraisingly. "Hum!" he said then. "Well, I guess we'll call it a day and come back tomorrow to tell the old man what's been fussin' him up. The show is over for to-night, anyhow."

"What is it?" Bud asked, with quick suspicion. "What's the answer, Tobe?"

"You wait, son," Toby returned. "First class in ghosts will be at ten tomorrow morning. If you're on the job, you'll hear o' something to your advantage."

CHAPTER VI.

LIFTING THE CURTAIN.

I WANT to call your particular attention to this here table, Mr. Crofton," said Toby.

They were assembled in the bedchamber the following morning—Crofton and Madigan on edge with curiosity, and Toby quietly enjoying their ill-concealed impatience. He had related the occurrence of the night before, though concealing, for the time being, Yoshu's connection with it.

"Th' table? What about th' table, Misther Lyons?" the old man asked.

"How long has it been standin' here?" Lyons pursued.

"Oh, I dunno. Years, I suppose. I don't have th' rooms changed around much." Crofton fingered his beard and nervously watched the detective's leisurely moves.

"Did you ever notice that it's got wires connectin' it with somethin' some place?" Toby went on.

"Wires? Certainly not! What do you mean, man?" Crofton spluttered.

"Just wires. Come and have a look at 'em," Lyons suggested.

Crofton and Bud eagerly stepped to where he indicated. Two fine wires extended from a leg of the table to the baseboard and thence ran along the floor and into the adjoining bedroom.

"Well, I'm—I'm shunned!" Crofton said, when this was made manifest to him. "What does this mean, Misther Lyons?"

"Come here a minute," Toby said. "Lift the lid o' this table."

"Lid? Sure that table has no lid!" he protested.

"Maybe not. But just lift, anyhow," the detective urged.

Gingerly the little man placed his fingers under the table top and pulled. It gave slowly, moving upward on noiseless hinges, like the cover of a box, and indeed that is what it had become. To the astonished eyes of Crofton and Madigan was revealed an assemblage of electrically operated appliances—of wires and shaded lights and mirrors and mysterious tubes that filled a spacious cabinet, cleverly built into the table.

"What th' devil is all this junk?" the little man demanded.

"I don't need no electrical catalogue to tell you," Lyons replied. "This is your ghost."

Crofton continued to stare, with Bud peering over his shoulder at the weird-looking collection, his jaw dropping as he took in the details of what was before him.

"Now, if you know of any party that would be specially keen to split you out from this here widow," Lyons began, when the old man suddenly smote his left palm with his right fist and leaped a foot from the ground. "My bye Bill!" he shouted.

"Your by—what's that?" Toby queried mildly.

"Me son—'tis his work!" Crofton exclaimed. "Th' hand o' William Crofton is in this! He's an electrical engineer an' inventor," Crofton hurriedly explained. "He went to Frisco yesterday mornin' on business about some fool invention o' his that'll never bring him in a nickel!"

"Say, why didn't you spill this before about your havin' a son?" Lyons demanded. "I thought you was all alone in the world. Why, that makes this here business a cinch! I was framin' to raid that Jap bungalow and drag 'em in here one by one. But Bill! He goes to the chair without the jury leavin' their seats!"

"An' this is what he does to his poor father that's slaved f'r him these twenty-five years!" cried Crofton.

"He must be some inventor if he tossed this layout together," Bud observed, after peering into the intricate mechanism during this colloquy.

"He invinted that auto horn—th' siren they call it—that y' can hear in th' next county," Crofton said.

"I know it!" Toby declared. "Then Bill is the fellow that got me to break the world's record for the standin' broad jump. I don't know what the record is, but I'm bettin' that from the car tracks to the curb on Spring Street breaks it, and I've made that four or five times when one o' Bill's horns whispered a block away."

"But how about this thing?" Crofton persisted. "What th'—what was it we saw, thin?"

"You'll have to ask Bill to give you a special matinée when he comes home," Lyons said. "I'm only givin' you a peek at the works. You can see where Mrs. Benedict nor Mrs. Nobody Else doesn't make any kind of a hit with William when she figures to horn into this here family and its spreadin' estates, to say nothin' o' the chances of

a little half brother happenin' along some day to divide the pot with him. So, bein' strong on inventin' things, he gets busy on inventin' a way to keep you from gettin' married a whole lot. Take a slant into this thing. You've got a photograph o' Dan Casey on your desk in the library. Bill knows you always swore by what Dan used to tell you in the old days—he was the one right man you ever hooked up."

"He was so!" Crofton said fervently.

"Well, Bill takes that photograph and makes a film positive from it—the same as they use in the movin' pictures. Here it is, you see, right in this corner. Then he rigs up a set of electric lights to be turned on by clockwork at midnight any time the current is hooked up—to come on slow and gradual and shine through that film and throw the image on these magnifyin' mirrors. See these? Look how they're curved out, like them mirrors at the amusement parks that

make you look fat or thin, accordin' as they're bent."

"By gorry, but you're a wizard!" the old man exclaimed.

"Nothin' to it when the lid is off," Toby said. "And that same lid, comin' up slow by machinery, hides all these lights and things from where you are across the room, and lets the magnifyin' mirrors throw Casey's picture life size on the wall. Clever stuff for Bill. It would be worth a lot to him—if it went over the way he rigged it."

The old man stood twisting his beard and glaring at the apparatus until a sudden thought struck him. "But th' voice, Misther Lyons!" he exclaimed. "Th' voice! You heard Dan speak!"

"Say, you can train a phonograph cylinder to say almost anything," Toby replied. "You ask Bill about that. Maybe he'll fix up a little show for the weddin' party. Come on, Bud. We got to be gettin' downtown."

JUST WHAT WE ARE

By Edgar Chippendale

THERE are loyal hearts, there are heroes brave,

There are souls that are pure and true;

Then give to the world the best you have,

And the best will come back to you.

Give love, and love to your life will flow,

And strength in your utmost needs;

Have faith, and a score of hearts will show

Their faith in your work and deeds.

Give truth, and your gifts will be paid in kind;

Give song, and song will meet;

And the smile which is sweet will surely find

A smile that is just as sweet.

Give pity and sorrow to those who mourn,

You will gather in flowers again;

The scattered seeds from your thoughts outborne,

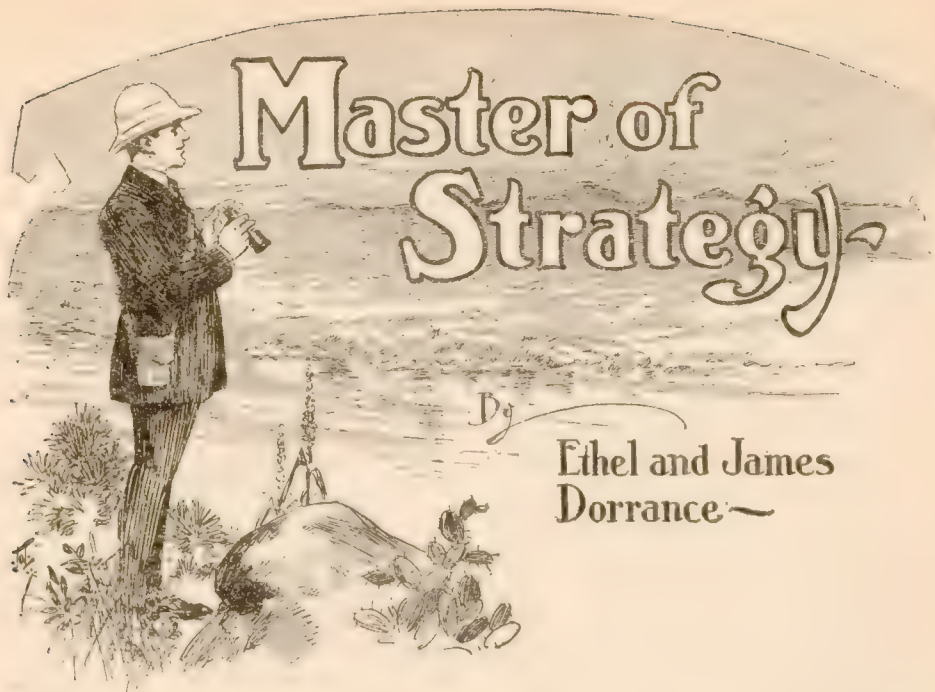
Tho' the sowing seemed in vain.

For life is the mirror of rich and poor,

'Tis just what we are and do;

Then give the world the best at your door,

And the best will come back to you.



THE arrival of Marcus Colby in Guadalajara puzzled the inhabitants. At a time when the whole Mexican republic was in a state of unrest, it did not seem likely that the young American would choose to take a pleasure trip there; but, whatever his object was, he kept it to himself.

A few days after his arrival he saw a beggar woman approach an American girl in the Plaza des Armas, and as the girl stopped to open her hand bag in response to a request for alms the woman grabbed it and ran away. Colby gave chase, and when the beggar ran into the cathedral he stood at the door and waited. In a few minutes a young Mexican came out, and Colby grabbed him by the collar and brought him back to where the girl was waiting. He explained that he had seen that the beggar costume was only a disguise, and ordered the man to return the bag, which, after some protestations of innocence, he did.

The arrival of Major Almonte complicated matters. He vouched for the young man's honesty, and at the girl's request Colby let his prisoner go. During a further conversation between the girl and Almonte, Colby took exception to the language the man used, and landed a hard blow on the major's jaw, and only the wall saved Almonte from measuring his length on the pavement. An automatic held carelessly in Colby's hand prevented any further aggression by the officer, who took his departure, warning them, as he left, that they would hear more about the matter.

The girl then introduced herself as Nora Saunders, the daughter of Wallace Saunders, one of the American residents; Colby told her his name, and said he was from Virginia. He said he had a letter of introduction to her father, so that they would probably meet again.

That evening as Colby was leaving his hotel to go to the American Club,

he was handed a note signed "Nora Saunders," asking him to go at once to her aid under the guidance of the bearer of the letter. He immediately agreed to do so, and after a long drive in a taxicab his companion escorted him into a house where he was greeted by a number of army officers. Then he realized that the note was a forgery, as he had been inclined to suspect; that for some reason he had been decoyed to this lonely place.

He was addressed as General Smoothbore, a man who had been given the task of landing guns and ammunition for the insurrectos, and the officers desired to know where the consignment had been hidden. Not being able to satisfy them that he was not their gun runner, they decided he had played them false and sentenced him to be shot at sunrise. The arrival of Major Almonte in the morning saved him, as that officer proved to the others that Colby was not "Smoothbore" Brice, the gun runner. The major, however, insisted on satisfaction for the blow of the day before, and in the duel that followed Colby disarmed his opponent. Colby then learned that the officers were not insurrectos, as he had believed, but were in the government service.

As they sat talking afterward in the hacienda, shots were heard outside, and the Mexican officers, warning Colby to stay where he was, rushed outside. The attack was made by a band of insurrectos, who quickly drove off the handful of government soldiers, and once more Colby found himself a prisoner. One of his captors, a civilian of striking appearance, Colby recognized, from the description he had heard, as Juan Valencia, an ardent admirer of Nora Saunders. Unconvinced by Colby's explanations and learning from an Indian servant his account of what had taken place, Valencia was persuaded that Colby was the gun run-

ner and had sold them out to the government.

"So, you double-dealing gringo dog, you're the gun runner we've been expecting!" cried Valencia, his blond skin turning hectic with fury. "To save yourself you sell us out to the government and completely pull the wool over my eyes with your tale of fighting Almonte. Fool I was to believe for a moment. *You* get the better of a killer like the major! I guess it is my turn to give you a little surprise. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER XII.

More than an Echo.

COLBY'S awakening on the second morning of his absence from Guadalajara was more gentle than had been the former, although his eyes opened on a situation quite as strange. This time the sun had served as his alarm clock, and a rather ineffective one at that, because of the indirection of its rays. From the look of the sky above, as seen through the chimneylike shaft in the rocks, he judged the day to be several hours advanced.

For a moment he stared about his dank, cramped environment with the mystification that often comes to one awaking in a strange place. Then, with a rush, came full remembrance of the incidents of the previous day and the plight in which he had been placed by his denial of the imputation laid against him by the Indian of adjustable patriotism. Obviously his situation had not changed overnight, for was not that small circle of sky still gleaming above him, and could he not hear the water of a spring trickling in the dark tunnel at his back?

Throwing off the bright-colored blanket that covered him, he scrambled to his feet. His first effort tested the capacity of his lungs in the uplifting of several lusty shouts, urged by a

vague hope that some one on the surface above might hear and be moved to investigate. When, after the long waits that succeeded each effort, no answer broke the contrasting stillness except the squawk of an inquiring buzzard, he realized the futility of trying to attract attention to his improvised prison, situated, as it was, at least a quarter of a mile back from a little-used highway.

As his glance fell upon a basket of native reed weave, which he had hung up the night before upon a peg, he recognized the urgent need for breakfast, and congratulated himself that the material for several meals, at least, was at hand. But first he went a few steps into the oreless mining tunnel to a pool which he had previously found, and, after quenching his thirst, performed a necessarily simple toilet. Opening the basket, he sat down tailor fashion upon his blanket.

The upturned lid revealed a jumble—cuts of *tortilla*, the corn bread of the peon; *frijoles*, as they call their favorite brown bean, and a roast fowl, carelessly plucked—such provender as could hastily be thrown together by the cook of the rebel troop after their meal at the hacienda.

He had begun a hearty breakfast when a self-put query caused him to halt with the leg of a chicken poised halfway to his mouth. "Under necessity, how long might life be sustained upon what ordinarily would be a one-day ration?"

The question seemed calculated to increase hunger, but instead Colby found his gone. Regretfully he returned the drumstick to the basket, which, in turn, he restored to the peg in the rock wall. He could not settle the exact span of days and hours that might answer his question, but the roughest figuring convinced him that this was no time for an everyday morning appetite to dictate.

Lighting a pipe, he forced his mind to review the details of yesterday, particularly those which had followed the Indian's mention that he had been negotiating with the government officers regarding a shipment of munitions. With Valencia and the insurrecto officers he had taken much the same stand as when first taxed with being Smoothbore Brice, but with even less success. He had contributed the information gleaned from Almonte—that the expected shipment had failed of landing on the West Coast. But that had seemed only to increase the suspicion against him. He stood convicted out of his own mouth, it appeared, when he announced that Lizardi, the emissary of the revolution, was a prisoner at the cuartel in Guadalajara, a fact of which the Andalusian was unaware, although he had been in the city all the time.

Even the excuse of caution, which had moved the governmentals to temporize, had been denied him, for there could be no doubting the identity of this attacking party. The situation had been made quite plain to him. The troop under the two officers had been sent in advance of a larger body to keep a rendezvous with Lizardi and get possession of the gun shipment promised by Brice. They had connected with Valencia, who had learned through underground channels of the conference at the hacienda, and had entered into the diversion of a raid in the hope of capturing a number of national officers. Once the Indian had reported the gun-running charge, the threats that had ensued, and the seeming compromise that ended in the friendly breakfast, nothing Colby could say had borne the slightest weight.

If he was Brice, the notorious gun runner, he had unquestionably sold them out; if he was not Brice, why had the Guadalajara authorities taken such pains to capture him? Thus had run their argument. Surely he could not

expect them to believe that such elaborate tactics had been for the mere purpose of permitting Major Almonte to prove that he was the poorer swordsman!

Part of Colby's story Valencia had credited—that which dealt with the conflict on the plaza. To this fact the American owed his present lease of life, uncertain as it was. The revolutionists, not overparticular about proof, had favored executing him on the spot. But Valencia had objected, pleading the valuable service which the accused had rendered "the cause" in recovering a certain hand bag. While the troop returned to the main body, minus the expected guns, Valencia could investigate further in the city. If he found that the American was not the gun runner, he had promised to return and liberate him. If his investigations proved his suspicions—well, what more need be said? The abandoned shaft would doubtless be responsible for its own.

The Virginian had wasted no time on futile regrets that he had not entered the fight and taken his chances in the subsequent flight. By no possibility could he have foreseen that the sinister charge against him would be repeated. Neither had it been possible for him to attempt force against their decision regarding the disposition of him. With his characteristic, seemingly careless affability, he had permitted them to lower him into the shaft—for the very good reason that he could not help himself. And here he was, thirty feet below the surface, with about as much chance of climbing out as if he had been built into the rocks during ages gone.

Reflecting on possible contingencies, he did not overlook the fact that Valencia might return, although the chances were decidedly against it. Having been doubly warned that the man was not to be trusted, Colby could not be sure whether he really meant

to inquire further into the gun-running charge or not. This "mysterious disappearance" method of disposing of a victim had seemed to appeal strongly to the Andalusian's sense of fitness. Besides, it was quite possible that he would hear things in Guadalajara which would convince him of the guilt of his prisoner.

There remained a third possibility, which, on being weighed, soon took the form of probability: If Valencia had been recognized by any of the fleeing Nationals, he would not last long in their stronghold. Well might he be unable to make a single inquiry or to return and effect the promised release even should he feel so disposed.

On the whole, the young man lounging at the bottom of the shaft decided that, as he did not feel ready for a permanent tomb, he had better set about trying to gain his own freedom. Once more he surveyed the walls of rock and marveled at their evenness. A chimney bored through clay could not have shown fewer projections. That the walls were of flint, rather than plastic earth, he demonstrated when he attacked them with his knife, intent on digging a series of holds that would permit his ascent. Scarcely had he begun on the second notch when the blade snapped off in his fingers.

"To Hades with all knives and guns!" he cried aloud.

There was something comforting about the sound of his own voice, hollow as was the echo sent back, and he continued with an experiment at laughter. An answer seemed to come faintly from above.

Although he adjured himself not to let his natural optimism overrule probability, he repeated his experiment in the form of a shout. Again an answer seemed to come, this time so distinct that he could not persuade himself that imagination, overwrought by his desire for freedom, was playing him tricks.

A moment later a face appeared, framed in the rounded top of the shaft—a face the first glance at which changed the entire aspect of his predicament.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

CAUGHT between surprise and relief, Colby felt that he would not have exchanged the most gala occasion of his life for that moment. The face was pale, oval-shaped, and anxious, lighted by two eyes which he knew to be startlingly blue, and crowned by a mass of soft, ebony hair.

"Hello, down there!"

With his ears substantiating the almost incredible evidence of his eyes, Colby's spirits rose.

"Hello, up there!" he returned irrepressibly. "You look like an angel above to me; it's worth while being a worm in the earth beneath just to gaze up at you."

"Hush!" the girl cautioned, leaning far over and speaking softly. "I hope to get you out, but first I must make certain that I am not followed. I'll be back in half an hour."

"Half an hour? You couldn't knock a few minutes off that eternity, could you now, Miss Saunders? I'm not keen about this worm rôle; I'm quite ready to ascend out of my subearthly existence. The top layer of terra firma is going to feel good to me."

The girl seemed to have lost her sense of humor, for she frowned, glanced over her shoulder, and then called down so softly that Colby could scarcely catch the words: "First I must make sure; then I must strike a bargain with you. I'll surely return."

Colby found himself staring upward at nothing more beautiful than the blue sky, but his prison had become a vastly more endurable place through the girl's promise. He never thought of doubt-

ing her word; he knew her sort, and he knew she would keep it. Suddenly, insistently, his appetite returned, and he took down the basket for a renewed attack on the fowl, the *tortilla*, and the *frijoles*.

At that, the seconds dragged into minutes, the minutes into fives and tens. But still he felt no anxiety, although he wondered that he did not. At last the sound of quick footsteps and the sight of the girl's face rewarded his faith.

"Did you think I had deserted you?" she asked.

"Not for a minute; I *knew* you hadn't."

Miss Saunders explained the delay, due to a party of rurales who seemed to be seeking some one. She had been forced to hide until they had ridden by.

"Did Valencia send you?" Colby inquired.

"Not exactly. He is not yet convinced that you haven't sold the government a shipment of guns that were meant for—well, for some one else. I overheard him telling my father where they had left you."

"Then they don't know that you are——"

"I do not ask any one's permission to pay my personal debts," the girl interrupted. "It happens that my father owns this rancho and I know every foot of it. I slipped away without telling any one. But it seems to me that you ask a great many questions for one who——"

Colby slanted a grin upward. "That's so," he put in. "Even you will never have a man more at your mercy, more at the disadvantage of being beneath you. Suppose that——"

"First," she stipulated, "I want a sacred promise from you."

Colby's laugh was spontaneous. "A dozen promises, Miss Shylock, and every one kept, would be small pay for hauling me out of this."

"You must be more serious," she chided. "If I free you, you must promise to speak no word against Juan Valencia and never to tell even him how you got out."

The Virginian suffered the first depression of spirits since her unexpected appearance. So, then, there was some truth in the gossip of the town? Could it be that she was already in love with the splendid-looking Andalusian? If not, why should she be so solicitous about his welfare? Yet, if she were, would she do a daring deed for an absolute stranger which she knew Valencia would disapprove? But what, after all, mattered her motives so long as she liberated him?

Then, all in a momentary flash, Colby realized that it did matter; that the joy would be taken out of his freedom; that the point would be quite left out of his adventure, if the report the padre gave of her was true.

"On my word of honor, I promise," he said at last, as seriously as Miss Saunders could have wished.

At once she consulted him over how she might best accomplish her self-appointed task. The winch and bucket which had been in position there, she reported, had been removed, but she had a rope on her saddle. She expressed the fear, however, that she was not strong enough to drag him out.

Colby directed her to find a piece of wood long enough to cross the mouth of the shaft and stout enough to sustain his weight. When she returned with this, he had her tie the rope to the middle of it, place the stick across the opening, and drop the end of the rope to him. He would do the rest, which prediction he soon verified by climbing hand over hand to the top and scrambling out of the shaft.

He seized one of her hands and gazed searchingly into her face, his eyes full of a question which he could not voice.

"How am I ever to thank you for your risk in riding out here to liberate a prisoner of war?" he asked.

"By leaving me at once, Mr. Colby, and by remembering only that you climbed out."

The hope in his face darkened. "I trust that one day I can repay you," he said. "Nothing in the world can ever make me forget your face as the shaft framed it a little while since. I thought the sky was good to look at until you came."

At the quiet, deep sincerity of his tone Miss Saunders flushed and glanced away; then she returned her eyes to his with an impatient look. "You paid me in advance in the plaza," she declared. "I owed you. Now we're quits."

"I see. You mean——" he began; then, fearing that the depth of his disappointment was showing in his tone, forced himself into jocularly. "If you mean that I am not to see you again, Miss Saunders, I am going to crawl back into the hole. There are some prices too great to pay, even for freedom."

"I didn't mean just that," the girl answered hurriedly. "It is only that our score is even. I hope we do meet in Guadalajara, after you have disposed of those guns and become less of a menace to society. But now you must go. You'll have to walk, for I dared not bring a horse for you. But you can't miss the way and some freighter may give you a lift. I'll return by another road. Good-by, Mr. Colby."

She started toward her horse, a black thoroughbred which stood concealed in some bushes near by, but Colby would not accept his dismissal until he had handed her into the saddle. With his hat in his hand he stood watching her until a bend in the trail hid her from view. Then he began to consider his own position.

"She does not want to see me until I have disposed of those guns," he reflected. "Well, for the sake of my perfectly good, unpunctured hide, as well as for that of a hitherto well-behaved heart, I'd better be getting back to Guadalajara and my interrupted affairs."

He started over the most worn of the several paths radiating from the deserted shaft, and found that it led to the highroad.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HUMAN ENIGMA.

[N the ten days that followed Marcus Colby's return to Guadalajara, he became the principal puzzle in that city of enigma; not any more to the natives than to the colony of his own Americans, whose number was rapidly shrinking through exodus to the States. Inquire as they might, and watch as they could through the machinery of an elaborate secret service, the government authorities had made little progress in determining the reason for the stranger's stay in the troublesome republic. The several groups secretly opposed to the established régime speculated in like uncertainty.

Through the aid of letters which he carried and presented as he considered advisable, Colby had acquired a wide acquaintance among the prominent Americans resident in the city. But these introductions, strongly as they were worded and of indubitable authenticity, gave no clew to the actual solution of the one-man problem. "Permit me to commend to your hospitality my friend, Marcus Colby, of Virginia, who is 'seeing Mexico.'" "Anything you can do for Colby, who is touring your adopted country, will be appreciated by us." "I want to make you acquainted with one of the most likable chaps in the world." So these missives ran. They were signed by

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bankers, attorneys, capitalists, all close business associates or intimate personal friends of the recipients, and they perforce opened every door.

They did not, however, scratch out any of the interrogation points surrounding Colby or Colby's affairs. Somehow it did not seem likely that even the most adventuresome tourist would choose this time for "seeing Mexico." Every American who had been able, without too great sacrifice, had already departed from the country. Each steamer that sailed north carried others who had considered their affairs as of less moment than the impending danger. Many of the men forced to stay had compromised by sending their families home, while they remained, sleeping with automatics under their pillows at night and wearing them under their clothing by day, the while maintaining a confident front. Indeed, it was not a time to be touring this "adopted country!"

So far as outward appearances went, Colby played the sight-seer's rôle with all consistency. He showed himself interested in all details of local industry, from the vast cattle ranches of the foothills to the cocoa-palm groves of Colima, from the chicle wilds to the fruit barrancas. One day, accompanied by the superintendent, he spent at the Falls of Juanacatlan, the Mexican Niagara, studying the electric plant from which the city derived cheap power. On another, the wild fowl of Lake Chapala lured him into a hunting trip.

The doors of the American Club had opened to him as a guest, and the members saw him occasionally in the late afternoon or evening. They found him a welcome visitor, one who could always match a good story, hold his own at dominoes, remain serene over the worst luck at bridge whist, pay his score without a sigh, and refrain from "talking business." Indeed, had he for

once violated this sacred rule against talking "shop," they might, in his case, have been better pleased. Hints had been given to him that he would be more comfortable at the Garcia or the Cosmopolita, "more regular and with-bath" hotels; yet he remained at the Arzapalo, professing the desire "to keep in touch with native life."

Speculation regarding him varied. Whispers of the gun-running charge upon which the government had taken him were general. It was equally plain that he was an object of interest to natives who were supposed to have revolutionary leanings. Some of the more sanguine among the Americans theorized that he was a writer, a foolishly zealous historian. Others declared him a mere soldier of fortune awaiting his opportunity; yet even these critical souls were forced to admit that he was superior to several predecessors of the type who had quartered themselves upon the colony at times.

Colby asked no favors, needed no loans to tide him over until funds arrived, and did not even ask that drafts be cashed. By no act or word did he show the faintest realization that he was the subject of any one's conjecture.

These and other facts regarding his interesting countryman, Wallace Saunders pondered as he lounged in an arm-chair behind the flat-topped desk of the library in his mansion on Hidalgo Street. His spare, cold face, chiseled like a cameo, was set in stern lines as he stared into a log fire that crackled in the grate, on account of the evening chill. His expression showed that he did not like enigmas, particularly American ones, of a human kind.

For twenty years the one remaining parent of Nora Saunders had "followed the rainbow" in Mexico, battling down the opposition of "gringo baiters," fighting for concessions against rival concessionaires, facing setbacks

with resignation and never admitting defeat. Six years previous, after suffering his heaviest blow in the death of his stanch life partner, he had taken stock of his affairs to find himself a "peso millionaire," as men worth five hundred thousand gold dollars or more are rated in Mexico.

Realizing that the struggle had been telling upon him, he had considered retiring. But as he looked upon the budding beauty of the girl child who represented all that was left to him of family obligation, he had shaken his head determinedly, decided "Not enough!" and thrown everything back into the pyramiding operation that meant great wealth for her or nothing.

To-night he stood definitely committed to what was at once the greatest risk and the greatest opportunity of his life, a political scheme to which the conduct of this strange American seemed antagonistic. Although his fears were mostly suspicions, he knew Colby to have figured twice in matters that were connected with it.

His cogitations were interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of his daughter.

"Daydreaming by your evening fire?" Nora asked, as she approached and seated herself on the edge of his desk.

"Just pondering over your mystery man, child," he returned. "I can't make him out."

"My mystery man? If you mean Mr. Colby, I met him again at the Country Club this afternoon. I am sure of only one thing about him: whatever his business may be, he is a gentleman, and one of the most attractive I have ever met."

Saunders glanced up, his blue eyes suddenly resentful. "You don't mean that you—/ Nora, you are not becoming interested in this adventurer—probably a penniless one?"

"Father," she said, with a laugh, "you are seeing strange things in the

firelight! I've been aware of Mr. Colby's existence scarcely more than a week. Have you ever known me to be——"

A knock on the door and the entrance of a *mozo* announced the arrival of Don Juan Valencia.

"To see me?" asked the girl.

"Don Valencia asked for your father, señorita."

"Then show him in here," ordered Saunders.

CHAPTER XV.

UNFOLDING A PLAN.

AS the servant departed, Nora started as if to follow, but her father added: "Stay and greet our friend, child. We have no secrets from you."

She was forced to do so, anyway, as Valencia hurried in before her father had finished speaking. His face lighted at sight of her with a tribute which any woman must have appreciated, and he stooped gallantly to murmur his pleasure over her hand.

Soon, however, he turned to the older man. "I wanted to speak with you about that Colby chap."

"Then you are just in time, for we were talking him over ourselves," returned Saunders calmly. "Sit down and let us hear what he's been up to now—something a shade more definite, I hope?"

"He spent an hour at the palace this afternoon; I have the report from Quintana Masso."

Saunders shrugged. "Calling upon his new friend Almonte, no doubt." He gave Nora a significant glance, evidently to impress upon her the double-dealing tactics of the stranger.

"Closeted with the governor," corrected the caller.

"Tried to slip in without attracting attention, I suppose?"

Valencia shook his head. "This Colby, or whoever he really is, never

seems to do anything the way you expect him to." The young man's gesture was impatient. "He drove up in an open landau and entered through the front door. From what that scoundrel Masso says, I wonder he did not have the guard turned out to receive him or hire a band to precede and announce him."

"He did, eh?" Saunders grumbled reflectively.

Nora smiled over the intensity of the two men. "Such an open visit is scarcely suspicious; nothing to be alarmed over, is it?"

"In itself, no; connected with everything else, yes," said Valencia. "He spent a full hour with old Benito Farias, evidently the friendliest sort of an hour, for the governor personally escorted him to the door and almost bent double over his farewells. You both know how deeply Farias hates Americans. As I've told you all along, that somber-clad vulture is around here for prey. For myself, I'm about convinced that he is the gun runner we expected, after all; that the munitions really were landed, and that he has sold us out. I'd give a thousand pesos to know how he got out of that hole in the ground where I dropped him."

By not so much as the quiver of one of her long black lashes did Nora Saunders betray her ability to satisfy his wonder. That secret would continue to be the property of only two, unless her cosharer should betray her trust in him.

"The man's a wizard," continued Valencia. "He's playing with white magic. First he traps a spy for Nora in the plaza and strikes Almonte. Then he meets the best swordsman in Mexico and disarms him; I've proved that a fact. He risks getting shot for double-dealing because he doesn't choose to run away. He whisks himself up from the bottom of a thirty-foot shaft as easily as you'd climb out of bed.

And now he has the governor crawling to him like a charmed snake!

He paused a moment to control his excitement; then he hurried on: "There was that day I was introduced to him before the Teatro Degollado, when I thought he was squatting in the bowels of the earth, wondering whether I'd come back for him or leave him to starve. Did he as much as bat an eye that he had ever seen me before? I tell you he's too stupid or too deep to have around."

"No man is too stupid to be afraid in this country to-day," remarked Nora.

Saunders addressed Valencia, and with point. "Lucky for you that he didn't tell of your earlier meeting! Unless he is holding off to trap us in some way, he behaved mighty white in that instance. But just there lies the danger, and it behooves us to learn more about one Marcus Colby, of Virginia. We must know *all* about him and without delay. The question is, how are we to find out the truth?"

"*Cherchez la femme!*" cried Valencia, not in an inspirational way, but as if about to unfold a plan.

"Young man——" the father began, the blue flame of the fire seemingly reflected in his eyes.

"Why, Juan, you can't mean that you would want me to question *him*?" interrupted Nora.

By their expressions the Andalusian saw their deduction. "Of course, I don't mean that!" he cried, reddening and turning impassioned eyes upon Nora. "I'd never dream of putting you in such a position, queen of the world! It is only that this Colby has a fondness for the sex, if I am any judge of his manner at the Country Club. At least, he must have some weakness, and since it isn't brandy or Scotch or cards, it stands to reason it must be women, doesn't it?"

"Of just whom were you thinking,

Juan?" asked Saunders less coldly. "Some señorita of your own people?"

"He would be on guard against any of us, but there is the widow—Mrs. Winters. A few smiles from her, if she cares to use her very best ones, and any red-blooded man would unbosom his soul."

"Does the fair Magda have that affect on you? She can't have better-grade smiles than I've seen her give you." Nora looked more than ever like her father as she spoke, cold and very calm.

Wallace Saunders' face, on the contrary, relaxed into an indulgent expression, as he studied her; but when he spoke it was directly to the young man. "That is not a bad idea, Juan, if she could be induced to try."

Nora again interrupted, mildly and pleasantly, as before: "I don't imagine you would need any particular inducements to make Magda Winters smile on the most fascinating mystery man who has come into Guadalajara in many a day; but even if you did, Don Valencia's request would surely be enough."

Then suddenly her even manner fell from her like a mask, and, to Saunders' astonished ears, she spoke with a rapidity and heat that reminded him poignantly of her mother.

"You two are supposed to be men of scrupulous honor," she assailed them both. "Do you think it is exactly—well, exactly clubby to put that siren on the trail of a stranger whom you have received as a friend and against whom you know nothing except that you do know nothing? Why not play your game as among men? Why inveigle that notorious flirt into it? I have no doubt about her, but you——"

Suddenly Nora stopped and bit her lip with obvious chagrin at showing her dislike of the fascinating Mrs. Winters so openly.

Both men smiled, but for different

reasons. The father's was a salute to the past, but Valencia's reflected an inner reminder of the usual cause of a calm woman's agitation.

"I heard Colby promise to come to the dance at the club to-morrow night," suggested Saunders.

"Then we have the time, the place, and the—the vehicle!" cried the younger man. "I shall see *la femme* in the morning and arrange the details."

"Why not to-night?" Nora was again serene. "The fair widow may have plans of her own for the ball."

"Not a bad idea—that about to-night," approved Saunders.

Juan turned to Nora, his disappointed expression showing that he had hoped for another sort of evening, one in which she would share.

Nora, however, amenable to no compromise, arose and started from the room. "Fix it up between you," she called back. "I have letters to write."

Valencia hurried after her. "Nora, don't drive me to despair to-night!" he called, heedless that her father should overhear. "Magda Winters is nothing to me. The fact that I'd be willing to use her in this ought to prove that I do not——"

"It proves that I have letters to write. A very pleasant evening, friend Juan." She called this from the stairs, smiling down at him kindly.

Some twenty minutes later, Valencia left the Hidalgo Street mansion, considerably cheered by certain sage, parental assurances as to the incomprehensible conduct of a woman in love and jealous.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE.

MAGDA WINTERS was an object to catch the eye. The curves of her rather petite figure were alluringly revealed this night of the floral ball by a diaphanous, coral-colored ball

gown, its tints seemingly reflected in her cheeks, deepened in her warm-blooded lips, remembered in the long earrings that dangled against her neck.

Her abundant hair, splendidly Titian, was wrapped in two massive twists about her head. She was dainty, alert, fresh looking, and yet suggestive of fire in more than the glory that crowned her. One had but to look into the hard gray of her eyes; to note the ring of pessimism that spoiled her laugh; to listen to her adroit repartee, to realize that, indeed, she was no ingénue; rather, a woman of experience, amply equipped to hold her own.

As a rule, a man had to be exceedingly vain or very unassuming to approach her with any degree of assurance. Marcus Colby belonged to neither class; yet he might have been either when Wallace Saunders introduced him to her. His manner paid due tribute to her manifest charms, even as his mind noted the fact that she was not his type of woman. He was scribbling his name upon her card for an early dance when her escort returned, to prove a surprise that was really a joy to two of them.

"Teddy Mechdolt, as I live!" Colby exclaimed, and thrust out a hand to the rather short, decidedly chunky newcomer.

Mechdolt's face, tinted red by exposure to the semitropical sun, rippled into a grin of indubitable delight.

"By all that's unholy—Mark Colby!" he returned. Their right hands gripped, after which each clapped the other on the shoulder. "Haven't seen or heard of you since the days of the Montana survey," Mechdolt went on. "What in Sam Tucker brings you to Guadalajara?"

The white-haired speculator awaited Colby's answer with keen interest, although he was careful to show no more than a sympathetic feeling of pleasure that two old friends should meet so

unexpectedly. This was the first time, at least the first in his presence, that the vital question had been put directly to the man of mystery. His reply held possibilities.

"Oh, I'm seeing Mexico at its worst and meeting some charming compatriots." Colby bowed toward the fascinating widow. She, in turn, smiled her appreciation; then she allowed her glance to fall on Wallace Saunders.

"Trust you for finding the charming compatriots," remarked Mechdolt. "In meeting Mrs. Winters, you have begun with the superlative."

During the brief exchange of news that followed, Saunders heard nothing that seemed illuminating. The chubby friend's report was the more specific, revealing that the two had been classmates at college, and, on graduating, had joined the same surveying party, together helping to lay the course of the newest transcontinental railroad in the States. Mechdolt had continued in the profession, and was now an assistant engineer in the construction of the line which the Southern Pacific of Mexico was building north from Guadalajara toward Tepic. Only that afternoon he had come in from end of rail, which accounted for him not having met his friend before.

According to Colby's account, he had quit engineering for an exploring trip in Brazil; had tried banking in New York on his return; had later been called, by the death of his father, to take charge of the family property in Virginia. There he had remained until his "constitutional wanderlust" had impelled him to "dub around" in Mexico.

The railroad builder seemed to find this report quite in character with the Colby he knew, but to Saunders it sounded more puzzling than explanatory.

Any further exchange was interrupted by the opening strains of the next dance. Teddy Mechdolt, after ar-

ranging for a next-morning meeting with his friend, took the widow away in the easy tread of a one-step. Colby noticed that before she turned, her eyes again sought those of the colony's leader; that she favored him with a little nod and an odd smile, as if of reassurance.

"I have this one with your daughter, sir, so you will excuse me," he said, and hurried off to find the reserved, beautiful Miss Saunders, who, by contrast, seemed more than ever a girl of his type.

The floral ball of the American Club, given in the height of the season, had become an annual event in Guadalajara. This year the lavishness of the decorations was exceptional; the music furnished by the city's most famous orchestra; the refreshments unusually elaborate. An outsider would never have supposed that, owing to the conditions in the state and the uncertainty of the near future, the board of governors had seriously considered omitting the function. Their final decision to issue invitations as usual had been made because of a prevalent desire to maintain a confident front toward the natives of their adopted country. They feared that the omission of so fixed an event would be taken as a sign of timidity that might give spur to the growing anti-gringo sentiment.

Yet with all their show of easy hospitality toward their Mexican guests—dark-eyed houris in gowns that spoke of Paris, soldier and civilian gallants in brilliant dress uniform or immaculate evening clothes—the ball was not the same as it had been in the past. Nora Saunders, dazzling in a gown of incomparable lines, with a fillet of pearls her only ornament, called Colby's attention to this fact as they were dancing.

"This being your first floral ball, you can't realize what a difference these years of troubling trouble have brought

to us," she said. "I wish you might have seen us in Diaz days. Most of our women have gone north."

"Enough here to suit me," Colby returned, with an emphasis which she could not fail to understand. "Besides, you wouldn't have been exactly as old—exactly as you are, in Diaz days. And if this floor were any more crowded——"

Miss Saunders helped him avoid an elderly Mexican couple who seemed to share unique ideas regarding the one-step.

"It is not the decrease in numbers that has made the change," she continued when able, in the determinedly impersonal manner which seemed to be her policy toward him, "although one surely does miss the friends who are gone. It is the undercurrent of unrest that possesses all of us, Latin or Anglo-Saxon. Don't you feel it?"

He held her off a moment in order to look meaningfully into her eyes. "At this particular moment, Miss Saunders, I can sympathize with the most malignant form of unrest, although—*particularly* at this moment—I have only a mañana feeling to spare for political troubles."

He thought—he hoped that her pale cheeks colored slightly, although she continued evenly:

"How is it all coming out? Is this brilliant land to be utterly destroyed by the master waster, war? Shall we all be driven out, as the populace threatens every time it gets excited? Sometimes I almost wish——"

The dance ended, and they were caught in the crush.

Later Colby remarked: "You seem always so calm, Miss Saunders, I have at times wondered whether you realized conditions."

"I—calm?" she queried in a voice that proved the charge.

"Yes, and so—forgive me—so cold. In the first place, I admire you sin-

cerely; in the second, I wonder how you——"

"I calm? I cold?" she interrupted, turning fully toward him with a glance that was a revelation. Her blue eyes blazed from their depths like the fires in a forge; her face was lit up until its pallor seemed luminous. "I am glad that I have deceived clever you, Mr. Colby; that is some reward for the effort I have made to appear what I am not."

The man looked triumphant. "So it is an affectation? But why?"

"Because"—she leaned toward him and spoke in a rapid murmur—"because I *do* realize; because I need all the calmness of judgment, all the coldness of intellect that I can command, to get my father and myself out of our treacherous predicament."

"Surely you can trust your father? And your many friends——"

"Mr. Colby, I dare not trust even the nearest and best." She paused and glanced about her with a hunted look; then she continued, in almost a whisper: "That is why I wear a mask; why I seem not to realize. But all the time I am afraid of—— Hush, here comes my father! Au revoir, Mr. Colby, I have enjoyed our little chat."

Before he could devise any way to reassure her of his appreciation of her confidence, Wallace Saunders carried her off on the pretext of an introduction to some one who was not named. Colby was left to puzzle in the company of a good cigar. Why had she chosen to drop her mask before him? Why did her father always appear to interrupt them when they were alone? What did she fear that could compel such perpetual restraint? Particularly, why did she so studiously avoid any reference to their two first meetings?

Colby's dance with Mrs. Winters proved to be a waltz and an unexpected pleasure, for in it their steps found perfect accord. At its close he studied

her card, to find every number taken. He was expressing his regret when something about her expression made him pause.

She laughed her mirthless laugh. "Don't be disturbed by an overplus of mere names, Mr. Credulity. Several of those scrawls are mere stop blocks made by my own fingers on behalf of certain favorites who don't practice preparedness." She paused; then, as he did not speak, added: "The two next to the last are fair samples."

"It is hard to choose," remarked Colby.

"Then take them both," she advised lightly. "You are the best dancer I'm likely to meet this evening."

Later, in the refreshment room, he found himself joined by Juan Valencia. In a manner quite casual, the handsome Andalusian volunteered information regarding Mrs. Winters. More than a year before, it seemed, she had appeared among them to settle the estate of a husband who had been killed in an automobile accident. She had not hurried about this, although no particular complications had developed. Evidently the climate suited her or she fancied the life of the "second city" with its superabundance of men. At any rate, she had stayed on, and even in the present uncertainty had given no hint of going home. Valencia thought that the town should congratulate itself on having made so charming a captive.

"And my friend, Teddy Mechdolt, is he——" Colby began.

"Your friend Mechdolt is a perfectly good moth."

Colby's retort was prefaced with a frown. "He may be, if your classification of that insect includes the best fellow in the world."

The first of the two numbers near the end of the program, the Virginian and the widow danced with a grace that called for more than one appreciative comment from the onlookers.

Nora Saunders watched them from where she sat among the palms with Valencia.

"That woman surely is a wonder!" he remarked. "I have an inspiration. If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll help things along for the mystery man."

Puzzled, Nora looked after him; then she returned her gaze to the particular couple of his interest. That they made a strikingly attractive pair, she was forced to admit, despite her dislike of the widow. She wondered if the stranger, who seemed so superior to the general run of men in most things, would fall under Magda's wiles.

Her thoughts were given a new trend by the sight of Valencia passing a piece of silver to one of the club servants. Following the boy with her eyes, she saw him speak to Mechdolt, who showed surprise at his message, and then displeasure. He signaled to Colby, who danced his partner near and stopped. The engineer spoke earnestly, first to the widow and then to Colby. They looked surprised, but both nodded and seemed to be bidding him good night. Mechdolt left the room. When Nora, escorted by both her father and Valencia, was leaving after the next dance, she saw the Virginian hand Mrs. Winters into her carriage and drive off with her.

"What was the message you sent Ted Mechdolt, Juan?" she asked, as they were approaching the Hidalgo Street mansion.

The Andalusian chuckled. "That there was a shooting scrape down at the railroad camp and he was needed at once. He'll be as angry as a cub-robbed she-bear when he finds everything quiet."

"Rather a small piece of work, isn't it—for you?" queried the girl, her profile showing, cold and distinct, against the carriage window.

Saunders interceded: "Not when you consider that the flame may be

lighting up the past of the newest moth this minute, my dear."

"And what," asked Nora very gently, "does Magda get out of it?"

"Don't worry about Magda," advised Valencia. "There are many things she may get—the scalp of an all-too-attractive gun runner, for instance."

Nora Saunders retired in the small hours that morning depressed by more than the fatigues of the floral ball. She felt a vague disappointment in one man and a positive one in another.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOLD IN THE HIGH.

TEDDY MECHDOLT was early for his appointment with Colby the next morning, but when he drove up to the Arzapalo in a dusty, sadly battered runabout he did not leave the wheel. The tooting of his horn brought out the obsequious Manuel.

"Bring forth my friend, the grand señor, you old reprobate!" shouted the engineer, with the seeming insolence that, when accompanied by his chubby, engaging smile, enabled him to handle Mexicans of the lower classes to unusual purpose.

The little, withered proprietor looked positively pleased at the designation given him by this most popular of gringos. "I bring him, Don Teddy," he said, and shuffled back into the hotel, to return a moment later with his par-rakeet and a very sly grin of his own.

At this demonstration that Manuel also had a sense of humor, Mechdolt unlimbered a string of "pet" names. "Cage your pest bird!" he finished finally, out of breath. "Go summon Señor Colby. Who else ever stayed with you that I would call friend?"

"Ah, it is *El Sombrig* you see! Truly he is the grand señor. Never before has guest of the Arzapalo had his own manservant."

"Do you mean to say that Mark Colby brought a valet with him?"

"Not with him, Don Mechdolt. Since he came he has acquired him, although where one who looks so like a brother to himself, I cannot guess."

When Colby emerged, Mechdolt glanced at his freshly pressed suit of the inevitable alpacas appreciatively. "Glad to see that you keep your lady's maid busy, Mark," he said, with scorn for his friend's acquisition. "Pile in! We can't talk around this den you have chosen for a hang-out. Every wall in the Arzapalo has a pair of ears, and I shouldn't be surprised if the cockroaches here make regular reports to those in the palace. I borrowed the general manager's flivver, and we can have a little privacy if we take it in the high."

They were driving south from the Alameda over the famous *Paseo*, when the ebullient mood suddenly deserted him and his eyes took on a poignant look.

"Mark, I want to ask you—did you take Mrs. Winters home last night, as we arranged?"

"Of course I did! And I didn't suffer any more regrets over your being called away than the law of friendship commands. She is an interesting woman."

"I was afraid some one else had stepped in—that blond Mexican Adonis, to be definite." Mechdolt's buoyant voice of a moment ago had become creepy with melancholy. "The message calling me away was a ruse; who sent it I can't be sure. The railroad camp was quiet as a graveyard when I got there—hadn't been a hint of shooting. Somebody wanted to get me out of the way for something, and I'm almighty sore about it; plumb spoiled the first evening in town after a month on the right of way."

Colby considered as the car spun along. "You might have spared your-

self worry, for no man spoke to Mrs. Winters after you left except myself. Valencia seemed much preoccupied with Miss Saunders. Why do you suspect him?"

"He's tried before to shunt me off Magda's siding," Mechdolt grumbled morosely, "and I just naturally don't like him. He may be Andalusian Spanish by blood, but he's Mexican born and a greaser at heart. I hate to see him mixing with our own women."

His friend turned to him with a compassionate smile. "I think you are drawing too close a line, Ted. Has it occurred to you that you may be merely jealous?"

"Not merely—more than jealous!" was the quick reply. "I'm worried and I'm mad. Valencia isn't playing the game on the level. Sometimes I think he's got Magda hyp't. She ought to see that it's Nora Saunders he's really after, but she chooses to be blind—anything to make a fat man miserable! I'd like to get just one good crack at Don Juan, but he's such a Chesterfield of politeness; handles his words about women as a squirrel does nuts—eats 'em."

"Something to be thankful for," observed Colby.

The railroad builder shook his head in vehement disagreement. "If he'd only breathe a careless word about Magda! But he's too close kin to a fox for that. Reckon I'll have to mislay the peace and amity of my nature and start a scrap myself." He slowed the car and stopped before a cantina. "Let's go in and have an oh-be-joyful; maybe it will work this time."

After they had looked at the world through the bottom of their tumblers and were again speeding along the drive Colby realized how deeply in love his friend must be, for at once he reopened the subject:

"Another thing that beats me is why she won't go home."

Colby looked his surprise. "Do you mean to say that, far gone as you seem to be, Ted, you want her to tear herself away?"

"This West Coast is no place for an American woman, Mark, the way things are going," Mechdolt replied. "It's no place for any of us. Our consul is gone, broken in health trying to make this harum-scarum outfit that calls itself government act like one. Washington has warned us to beat it, and evidently washed its hands of us because we stick on in the hope of grabbing a little more. Ali Baba and his forty thieves were petty larcenists compared to Governor Farias and his gang."

"Already," he went on, "they've started putting on the screws—'intervening' on the ranches, which means a fifty-fifty split on all stock and crop increase; 'denouncing' the best mines, which is nothing more than hogging them by relocation; and when it comes to loans—well, you must know what a 'loan' means in Mexico these days! The big blow-off is on its way and at express speed. Then they'll just calmly appropriate everything they haven't already taken and kick us all out."

Knowing Mechdolt to be a shrewd observer and not given to exaggeration, Colby was more deeply interested than he would have cared to state. If it were really true that the millions of American investments were in such jeopardy, that the colonists might soon be driven from their homes and their business—but then the Mexican government would scarcely dare to offer such an affront to the "Big Brother" republic on the north. With the thought of drawing out his friend, the Virginian raised a question:

"There are the revolutionists, Ted. From what I have seen, Farias and his crowd are none too securely planted,

with the enemy steadily edging closer. Suppose they take the city?"

"Then—good night!" cried Mehdolt. "If those cutthroat pillagers ever get a strangle hold on Guadalajara, we won't even have the meager comfort of being kicked out—we'll be shot up!"

A look of deep calculation settled on Marcus Colby's face. According to his viewpoint, it was all important to get the Americans out of Guadalajara, but mercy urged that it be through some gentler agency than "The Scourge" victorious. His expression reflected the question of ways and means which the subject suggested.

"Why don't you do it, Mark?"

Mehdolt's blunt question startled Colby. "Do what?" he asked.

"Slip down to Manzanillo and take the next boat north, while the slipping is good. There is nothing to keep you now, is there?"

"Me—slip north?" Colby could not restrain a laugh. "I reckon I can take care of myself as well as the rest of you. If things are as ominous as you say they are, I may find it worth while to be on the spot."

"Don't get you, Mark. This isn't your fight."

Colby laughed again. "I heard exactly that admonition a few days ago, and accepting it got me a lot of excitement. There are reasons why I want to be around if the anti-gringo pot should boil over."

"You don't mean to say that what they're suspecting you of is true—that you brought in the guns and are only waiting your chance to——"

"I don't mean to say anything," Colby interrupted. "Just remember that, Ted, whatever happens."

"Humph! Well, every man to his own business; thank the Lord yours isn't mine, if that is it, old top!" exclaimed Mehdolt. "Of course you know that you're a marked man; that your stay here is foolhardy; you'd bet-

ter go north or whatever direction it is you came from. I'd vamoose myself if I could persuade Magda——"

He broke off at sight of a pair of riders who, at the moment, cantered into the drive from a side road. Instantly Colby recognized Valencia in his conspicuous gray tweeds; one glance at the hair of his companion established her as the flame woman whose name had just been mentioned. Both were mounted on superb blacks of Spanish-Arabian strain.

As the car passed the horses, the two men raised their hats and Mehdolt added a characteristically effervescent greeting. But when Colby glanced his way the next moment his friend's ruddy face was distressed.

"If he only meant his attentions honestly, I'd take it more like a man." The engineer spoke as if to himself; then suddenly turned on Colby. "You say Valencia made no effort to speak to her after I left last night?"

"He didn't come near us, Ted."

The car was turned about, and started back toward town, but its snail's pace showed that the driver had no desire to overtake the couple, the sight of whom had plunged him into his present depression.

At length he sighed; then he spoke: "I begin to see a light, Mark. I'm not going to ask you any questions as to what passed between you and Mrs. Winters. After telling you how things stood between us—that I am only waiting her decision—I don't need to. But I know Valencia's habit of using women. And we won't say any more about that gun-running gossip. Suffice it to say that the Mex has some reason of his own for wanting to know more about your affairs than he's been able to find out, thanks to the mum plaster you keep on your tongue. On some plausible plea he's persuaded poor Magda to turn the trick. Mind you, I'm not saying a word against her ex-

cept that Valencia's got her hypnotized. Now, if you've got any secrets on your soul, check them at the Arzapalo before you see her again. She's a multiplied third degree at making a fellow come across clean."

Colby's laugh, as he reminded his friend that he was not in love with Mrs. Winters, was meant to be reassuring. He did not report, however, on their parting the night before, which had been a bit tremulous on one side. He recalled every word of it:

"I am in trouble, Mr. Colby—grave trouble," the widow had told him. "I must have the advice of some capable, absolutely disinterested man, and you're the only one I know. Won't you come to see me to-morrow afternoon, hear me, and advise me?"

Since he had promised to do this, Colby felt grateful to Mehdolt for the warning, although he saw no necessity of saying so or explaining why. He might be able to repay him in more than empty words—by urging the flame widow to light the way of his friend into a less combustible atmosphere, for instance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTENTIONS OF DELILAH.

HALF an hour after Marcus Colby had left the small house of concrete and Spanish tiles, which Magda Winters occupied with an aunt who had accompanied her from the States, a taxi set down a second visitor. He was evidently expected, for the petite widow herself threw open the door. Juan Valencia, immaculate in white flannels, entered as into a familiar place.

Magda's sitting room sounded a distinctly American note in its comfortable furnishings of wicker, upholstered in blue-flowered chintz—a decided contrast to the unlivable, against-the-wall primness of the typical Mexican par-

lor. With a languid air, the handsome Andalusian settled himself and gazed at his hostess, who stood with one arm laid along the low mantel, a decidedly attractive figure in a tea gown of nun-like gray. The look of his dark eyes, if a woman were not particularly analytical, was a compliment, although something that lurked in his smile might have repulsed.

"You look fit to search any man's soul, auriferous one," he commented, in a tone that was a caress.

The widow laughed gayly. "Shall I put you on the rack while I'm in practice?"

"The rack of an empress to be!" His eyes glowed with sudden warmth.

"To be, Juan—am I not your empress now?" she asked, drawing up to her last inch, which did not seem scant, thanks to her perfect proportions.

Valencia continued to level that covetous, flattering gaze upon her. "Mine now—Mexico's later, if gold and our will can crown you."

"To-day," she said lightly, "I feel more like Delilah."

"So! You trimmed his mystery locks? I knew you could do it."

"Then you knew too soon." Magda spoke impatiently. "I had the intentions of Delilah and tried to look the part, but I have only a few suppositions and one fact to show for my pains."

"Is the fact important?"

"Perhaps." She gazed down at him keenly as she added: "Juan, the Virginian is already seriously in love with Miss Saunders."

Valencia returned her inspection imperturbably. "That, at least, is not dangerous to our plans. If that is your one fact, then serve me with your suppositions."

"I don't think he is the gun runner."

"You don't? What or who is he, then?" he quickly interjected.

Mrs. Winters did not reply at once, for she made a small tour of the room,

to settle finally in a chair near that in which her caller half reclined.

"As you have already discovered," she began, when curled up in the chair, "this man Colby is about as garrulous as an oyster with a shady past. If I were not—well, Cyrus Keating's niece, you know, I might not have found even a basis for suppositions. With the average person your confidence will beget his. But Colby! I told him a long, sad story about myself, and how my rich uncle's dictatorial ways drove me from home, and instead of being bored into switching to the subject of himself he was interested—positively *interested*. He drew me out and gave me some very good advice. Imagine it!"

"How can I imagine it," suggested Valencia, "unless you tell me what it was?"

She looked at him strangely. "No, I'm not going to tell you; I might decide to take it. Besides, I'm not the topic of interest to-day. Colby has been everywhere in Mexico and has learned a great deal for a gringo. He knows, for instance, that the cathedral in Morelia is the most beautiful in the republic; he has been in Tepoztlan on San Antonio's day when they dye the hens a beautiful pink and spangle them with little stars in honor of the occasion; why—he even knows that the barbers in Aguas Calientes charge just half what they do in other places!"

Valencia threw up one hand and both eyebrows. "If you wasted your time discussing cathedrals, spangled hens, and barber economy, when did you come——"

"One thing he said is about as important as another," she interrupted. "Mr. Colby is a delightful talker and was most diverting. I have you to thank, dear Juan, for an hour that, in many ways, was illuminating. I had tea served—he takes two lumps and no rum——"

"For the love of patience, Magda, haven't you any *news*?"

"Yes, Juan. Mr. Colby thinks it is no longer safe for me in Guadalajara. He advised me to hurry down to Manzanillo and take the next Pacific mail boat to San Francisco. He asked me all about my business affairs—in fact, offered to help me wind them up if I wished. He is a very kind man. He thought the trip would do me good, especially if I went with—well, if I had some congenial person along to take care of me. It rather appealed to me as he talked about it. It would mean leaving you and all our dreams of—but, of course, we did not discuss you or the dreams."

Juan Valencia arose, stepped over to her, placed a hand gently under her chin, and looked a world of reproach down into her piquant face. "Oh, golden one, forbear tantalizing me longer to-day! You know you have no intention of leaving me, and, if we are to realize our dreams, you must be my helpmeet, not my tormentor. This Colby's advice that you join the refugees doubtless came direct from your devoted Mechdolt, so it does not matter."

"But it does matter!" she contradicted mockingly. "On it hangs the chief of my suppositions as to Marcus Colby."

Magda settled back in her chair with a sphinxlike expression, and busied her fingers twining a vagrant Titian strand into the coils of her hair.

Valencia stepped backward that he might have perspective for his look of amazement. Could this be the amazing discovery of which she had telephoned him a few minutes before? Had Colby been keen enough to see their hook and steal their bait with his flatteries? Adroit he had proved in tight situations that were man made; was he also superior to the charms of this most fascinating bit of femininity?

Either that—or Magda had not done her part! He looked frank disappointment in the woman he had sought to use.

"Vain little doll," he remarked to himself. Aloud he demanded: "Do you mean to say, Magda, that you allowed him to talk all the time about yourself—that you gulped his sugared pill?"

The widow returned his gaze calmly. "Don't talk that way to me, Valencia! There is no reason why I should do your bidding unless I want to. Mr. Colby's personal talk did me a lot of good—set me to comparing you and my ambition to be a woman of power with safety first and a gentler man."

"Why, you little minx, I thought it was all settled that——"

"Nothing is settled," she interrupted. "I am only considering you. As for Colby, I don't mind giving you a few tips about him—if for nothing else than to pay back that queen of snobs, Nora Saunders. Firstly, he is in love with Nora, and he is the sort of man that gets the woman he loves."

"He is, eh? Well, by Heaven, so am——" Valencia stopped short in his indiscretion, but had no way of controlling the angry color that had dyed his blond skin.

Magda smiled. "Ah, I feared as much! You're a traitor to the core," she observed. Then she returned resolutely to the subject of discussion. "Secondly, Colby's object here is to drive us Americans out of Guadalajara—myself, Wallace Saunders, all of us, excepting perhaps Nora, whom he'll naturally try to keep."

"Not if I can devise a way to counter," muttered Valencia *sotto voce*.

"What was that, my friend? Up-to-date villains never mutter!"

The Andalusian shrugged his shoulders, but his voice was lifted as he declared her idea ridiculous and asked

what possible object Colby could have in trying to drive the Americans out.

"I shall make myself a little plainer, for the sake of the past if not of the future, about which, as I have told you, I shall decide later." Magda flashed him her tantalizing smile. "You have a good brain, Juan. Now listen and use it. There is a certain all-powerful Somebody in Mexico City who wants, above all things, to confiscate the American property here. Several of his schemes have failed, but accepting failure is not one of his habits. Now this man Colby is close to the all-powerful Somebody; that fact squeezed through the clothespin guard he keeps on his lips. He knows that some bomb is going to explode and that soon.

"I believe," she went on, with assurance, "that he is an agent sent here to bring about, by hook or crook, a general exodus of the Americans in Jalisco State, so that Somebody can step in and do the rest by decrees of abrogation, confiscation, and condemnation. It looks like a right clever scheme to me—one that will doubtless make *El Misterio* an exceedingly rich man."

Valencia stared at her wide-eyed, his finely chiseled mouth open. Well under his breath he rasped a name that had grown to be synonymous with terror in the Republic of Trouble. "You mean——" he began.

"I mean—just nothing at all." Magda laughed lightly and rose to her feet. "I have an engagement now. You'd better go off by yourself and think it over. Colby is not a man to be easily thwarted. And you—what would you do, with your peso millionaire gone and your dream of becoming Emperor of Mexico evaporating into thin air, as do all poor men's dreams? It is a perfectly good dream, though! I must admit that if you were as good as our dream, it would prove an irresistible temptation to me."

"You have changed toward me, little

golden one"—the caress returned to his tones—"but you will soon change back when things begin to come more my way, and one day you will be rewarded. That gun-running suspicion did lead us astray, and your intuition, I think, is to be trusted. You are invaluable."

"I am frequently told that by a more honest person," said Magda. "You will try to buy Colby off?"

"Was I ever crude, dear girl?"

"Well, don't try to frighten him!" she advised. "Just trust to my lauded intuition that that wouldn't work."

"Never fear, little temptress. Rest easy that Guadalajara shall be well rid of its enigma—and soon."

His adoring smile of farewell was quite lost in a scowl of rage as he reached the street. "What a bet I overlooked not to let them shoot him that morning at the hacienda!" he was thinking. "But I'll soon devise some way just as good. He'll drive them all out excepting Miss Saunders, will he, the gringo dog?"

CHAPTER XIX.

INVITATIONS ACCEPTED.

MECHDOLT appeared to be himself again as he sat chatting in Colby's room at the Arzapalo with a humor that took his host back to college days. They were interrupted by the entrance of Colby's valet with a letter. Mechdolt echoed to himself Manuel's comment on the similarity in type of master and man while the Virginian read the evidently brief missive.

"It's an invitation that takes your name, I hope, not in vain," remarked Colby, and tossed over the sheet.

The engineer's brow knitted as he read a gracefully worded request that Colby join a party which Señor Juan Valencia planned to take that afternoon to his rancho for a turn at coursing. If he could accept and would so indicate to the messenger, a car would

be sent for him at one o'clock. The closing sentence read: "I am asking your friend, Señor Mechdolt, to join us."

"First I've heard of it," remarked the plump person so honored.

Colby suggested that possibly the messenger waiting below carried another invitation, and sent his man to inquire. Soon a second note was in their hands that proved to be identical with the former, except for the change of names.

"I don't get this hombre," puzzled the engineer. "He likes me about as much as he would a wild cat that had landed between his shoulder blades, and he sure isn't cottoning to you for love alone. Shouldn't wonder if I'm rung in as an added inducement for you to accept; but why should he go out of his way to give you an afternoon of ripping sport?"

"You as an inducement might be beaten," Colby said. "Are any of the fair likely to be of the party—Mrs. Winters or Miss Saunders, for instance?"

There was a note of resentment in Mechdolt's laugh as he replied: "If one is, t'other isn't; those particular dames mix like oil and water."—As if struck by a startling thought, he leaned toward Colby. "Say, Mark, you seem to have fallen for Nora Saunders' fatal pallor—have you, by any chance now, shown it when Don Juan was around?"

Colby gave a fair imitation of his friend's portentous manner. "Few know of my susceptibility as do you," he declared in a stage voice. "Not to a soul have I yet revealed——"

"G'wan with you!" came the serious interruption. "Making fun of the nose on your face wouldn't make it any less plain. I get a glimmer of what this jack-a-snipes is up to; what he set Magda on your trail for; why he invited you out to his rancho." He heaved the very gusty sigh of relief

that might have been expected of one of his build.

"You mean that Valencia is——"

"Afraid you're making progress out at Hidalgo Street."

"Then why the invitation?"

"Quién sabe? Do you think I know everything all at once? Let's go and find out."

Colby pondered a moment. Several facts in his possession made him uncertain as to whether his friend was arguing from a true premise—whether jealousy was the sole motive of Valencia's proffered hospitality. While thought of Nora Saunders had seemed to be perpetually in his mind since their first meeting in the plaza; while his interest in her had crept toward his heart until that organ had acquired an uncomfortable habit of speeding up at every mention or sight of her, he did not feel that he had paid her open enough attention to have aroused the Andalusian.

Being fully aware, on the other hand, that Mrs. Winters had done her utmost at their interview of the afternoon before to beguile from him the real object of his continued stay in Guadalajara, he realized that the invitation might have sprung from Valencia's quickened interest in his temporal rather than sentimental affairs. Yet he was not averse, since his beautiful countrywoman might be present, to take the risk of finding out.

"All right," he said, "we accept."

There were seven in the party that rolled over a palm-lined road into the country that afternoon. The large touring car which carried them was driven by an English commercial agent named Picker, who, owning the machine, gallantly pressed Nora Saunders into what he called the "seat of honor" beside him. His wife graced the tonneau, entertaining, with a running fire of small talk, Colby, Valencia, Mech-

dolt, and a young Spanish friend of the host.

The distance to the rancho was quickly covered. They alighted before a small hacienda of terra cotta, with a garniture of emerald moss about its cornices and moldings, picturesquely set in a grove of magnificent ash trees. The walk to the house was over a veritable carpet of creeping flowers.

After making them welcome on the piazza and ordering refreshments served, Valencia left to see about the mounts for the chase. While they were waiting, Nora Saunders' eye fell upon a blooming plant of the pincushion variety which she declared was new to her and descended into the garden for a closer inspection.

It would not have been like Marcus Colby to neglect this opportunity. Disregarding Mehdolt's frown, shaking off his clutch of a coat lapel, the Virginian followed and offered the girl the benefit of his botanical knowledge.

The moment they were out of hearing she transferred her attention from the floral curiosity to the human one beside her. "You ride, Mr. Colby?"

"My favorite exercise."

"I mean, you have ridden to hounds?"

"Since my knees were old enough to grip leather; we have foxes in Virginia, Miss Saunders. Friend Mehdolt tells me that the coursing here is after jack rabbits; still, the rider's part must be the same."

Miss Saunders hesitated, a troubled look in her eyes. "The course here is frightfully rough, the most treacherous going I've ever seen; and Don Valencia's horses are really half wild, so little are they used. You see, it has been necessary to keep them hidden in the mountains much of the time since the trouble began to protect them from raiders. Might I advise you to keep a tight rein and take no chances?"

Colby was pleased with her caution.

It showed a concern about him which gave him a more satisfied feeling than he had known since arriving in Guad-alajara. The warmth of his heart glowed in his eyes.

"You are very good, Miss Saunders, very good and kind to warn me," he said hesitantly. "I don't wonder that you feel nervous about me after the hole you dragged me out of. But you mustn't. Even in my rash, earlier youth I was careful enough to grow up."

A movement on the porch made it advisable for them to rejoin the others. Valencia had returned with the announcement that horses and hounds awaited their pleasure. He showed no annoyance at noting the approach of Colby and the girl, and Mehdolt's brow had cleared.

With a love for thoroughbreds born in him, Colby could not suppress his admiration for the animals they found stamping in the corral—saddled and bridled and in the care of several vaqueros in picturesque garb. Each showed points that must have come straight from some Arabian sire, modified by a Spanish dam. About the band four English greyhounds stretched their gaunt frames as if in preparation for the race which they knew, as well as the men did, was at hand.

"And for you, Señor Colby," said the host, after the women had been mounted, "I have selected El Viento, who can make a tornado ashamed. Is it not fitting that the stranger in our midst should win the coursing honors? This beauty will do his part to bring you in at the death."

A courteous speech this—its tone all sincerity; yet Mehdolt nudged his friend's elbow suggestively, and in other ways indicated that, to his suspicious mind, the Andalusian was oversugaring the dose, although the horse indicated was clearly the pick of the *caballado*. Indeed, he was as fine an

equine specimen as the Americans had ever seen—a magnificent black stallion with silver mane and tail. While most of the other animals required holding by the vaqueros, he stood as the flung bridle indicated, impatiently waiting. In Colby surged the anticipated joy of the chase; he swung lightly into the saddle.

Half a mile out on the range, the hounds started their first jack, and with a chorused yelp were off like four gray-and-tan streaks. The horses caught the excitement and tore after them. The course was on.

With the second jump at the new pace the Virginian remembered Nora Saunders' warning, for the call of the equine wild seemed to inspire El Viento. The snort that rasped back from his nostrils had an angry sound. At once his horse scream shrilled; then followed a burst of speed that would have been incredible to Colby had he not been part of it.

Swerving suddenly to the right, the stallion struck off toward a stretch of broken country, the chase disregarded utterly. A quick test with the reins told the rider that El Viento, gone unaccountably wild, was "on the bolt" for a field of unimaginable hazards.

CHAPTER XX.

SCARCELY AN ACCIDENT.

AS the outlaw horse continued its bolt toward the bad lands, Colby made a discovery that impelled his suspicion back to his host. He was riding with a soft bit! He felt that there could be no doubt of it, as he sawed on the reins to bring the animal under control. He knew that no Mexican would have trusted himself on the back of a stallion with less than a Spanish spade bit, while the most indifferent precaution demanded at least a U-bit. This fault of equipment could mean but one

thing: Valencia must have planned the danger for him.

Was its purpose to bring him a cropper before the eyes of Nora? He could not think so—not from the way the silver-trimmed black was running toward the upheaved country. It seemed more likely that the design was to bring his personal activities to a full stop—a safety-first period that might cost the Andalusian a fine horse, but no further penalty.

Colby inwardly berated himself. Forewarned of Valencia's craftiness, knowing that their interests were vitally opposed, why had he not played safe rather than right into his enemy's hands? In answer he did not spare himself; he had accepted the invitation in the hope of seeing Nora Saunders, on the chance of furthering what had come to be a self-admitted purpose.

But his carelessness in not examining the accouterments of his mount! For that he had no defense, unless it was that the beauty of the animal and the sporting prospect had dulled him to caution.

Now he faced the penalty for two mistakes—one of the heart, the other of the head. From the speed of his present onrush, the payment would not be long deferred unless he could meet the emergency.

To throw himself off the bull-necked beast was the first possibility that flashed into his mind. They were traveling a close-cropped prairie at the moment, and, with luck, he might be able to "take a fall." Then entered the objection that this would be a partial triumph for Valencia. He felt himself clutched by a stubborn desire to fight it out from the saddle, to conquer this unwitting four-legged tool, once more to foil the Andalusian.

El Viento was topping the rise; below them lay a *vega*, a grass-green meadow of perhaps a dozen acres; beyond was the dry wash of a small river,

then the rocks! If he could in some way check the stallion and direct his madness into a contest for supremacy here in the meadow!

As his eye fell upon the *mecate*, a maguey tie rope which hung looped from the saddle horn, an idea struck him. It was the work of a second to form a noose in the end of the rope. With knees gripped tight against the heaving leather of the saddle, he leaned forward for the cast. His first throw missed, which was not surprising, in view of their furious descent of the slope. His second effort brought a thrill of hope, although it was but an indifferent success. Instead of surrounding the stallion's muzzle, the loop had tightened around his open jaw, stretched wide in an equine bawl just as the rope was thrown.

Colby had only a moment. Using the saddle horn as a snubbing post, he drew back on the rope with all his weight and strength. As the mount's neck twisted under the strain, his speed perforce slackened. The grinding of his teeth could be heard above the pounding of his hoofs as he gnawed at the tough fiber of the rope.

When molars triumphed over the handicap of a mouthful of bit, the *mecate* broke with a suddenness that threw the straining rider against the cantle of the saddle. With a threatening scream, the horse flung his head around, then began to cavort in circles, his rage concentrated on that creature upon his back who had thrown the rope. He forsook his death rush toward the rocks; the contest between man and mount was on!

Meantime, owing to the Virginian's misadventure, the chase had been abandoned, the jack rabbit forgotten by all but the hounds. With strained faces and urgent spurs the party had turned from their course and were racing after the black. He had distanced them, however, with his superior speed, so

that they did not see the expedient by which Colby had turned the flight into a battle.

Valencia was first to top the rise. At sight of the strange contest in the meadow below, he pulled up sharply. Nora Saunders ranged her fleet hunter alongside, and stared down with wonder mixed with fright. Mr. and Mrs. Picker followed, and last came Teddy Mechdolt, who was none too good a horseman and something of a weight for the stanchest mount. The three vaqueros who had formed the rear guard of the chase made the knoll a little to one side and looked on with jabbering comment.

Squealing and snorting like a mad thing, the great black was cart-wheeling about the meadow, intent only on freeing himself of his clinging burden. Despite the carpet of grass, the pounding of hoofs reached the watchers plainly. Colby proved himself a graduate of both range and hunting-field schools of riding by the tenacity with which he held the saddle. He seemed to foresee every trick of the many which El Viento attempted and to be able to checkmate each of them.

Nora Saunders turned imperatively to her host. "Why do you delay?" she demanded. "Ride down and rope that locoed fiend before he kills your guest!"

Without removing his eyes from the battlers, Valencia shook his head.

"Then order your vaqueros down—if you're afraid!"

The scorn of her voice caught Valencia's attention. "They will have to fight it out, Nora. The approach of another rider would only arouse the black the more."

"But a pair of you could stretch the beast if you roped him right," she insisted. "I've seen it done. Oh, if I were only a man!" She turned and appealed to the approaching Mechdolt: "He's your friend; can't you devise a safe way of helping him?"

But the engineer agreed with Valencia that any attempt to interfere would do more harm than good. "Don't worry," he added, although his own face looked blanched. "I've seen Mark Colby ride circles around the buckaroos of two Frontier Day shows. With half a chance he'll wear that demon out and ride him back at a walk."

There was logic and sincerity in this argument; there was also a strong sporting hope that his friend would introduce something that was not on Valencia's program. He was saved from hearing any further reproach from the girl by the noisy demonstration among the vaqueros.

"Do they think they're at a bullfight?" he muttered, and rode toward them. As he approached he heard a remark that silenced his intended admonition, even as it opened his ears to their further chatter, uncurbed by any thought of a listener.

Down in the meadow the fight went on—a continued spasm of twisting and bucking circles. Still the man retained his seat, as though a part of the ponderous saddle.

A duet of terror escaped the throats of the two women watchers, as the horse, evidently despairing of his usual tactics, deliberately reared, "sunfished" for a ghastly second; then threw himself over backward. It seemed that the rider must surely be crushed. But the next moment the onlookers saw that, by some incredible squirm, Colby had thrown himself from the saddle. As the beast crashed heavily, the man sprang to one side, evidently quite uninjured.

Doubtless as surprised in his way as were the spectators in theirs, El Viento scrambled to his feet. The Virginian made a fling for the saddle, with the evident intention of regaining his seat. This time, however, the beast scored through a sudden swerve and a fling

of the head that broke Colby's hold on the reins.

The group on the knoll drew a deep breath when they saw that he did not fall. Now that the horse was free, he would doubtless race away. But the maddened Arabian soon proved that he had no such tame intention of calling the battle a draw. With a scream of reiterated defiance, he charged upon his human enemy. Colby sprang to one side and avoided the rush. The black demon then turned, as on a pivot, reared to his hind quarters, and advanced with his forefeet ready to strike.

Nora Saunders tightened her reins as if to start down the slope, but Picker and Valencia caught them. There was none, however, to restrain Teddy Mechdolt. The maniacal conduct of the horse, together with the gossip he had heard from the vaqueros, changed his policy of inactivity. Digging a spur into his mount, he started down the hill, drawing his revolver as he went.

But before he had covered half the distance, the crux of the battle was reached. As the horse struck out with murderous hoofs, intent on pawing his victim to the ground, Colby sprang to one side and then forward with such calculation that he landed in the saddle as the beast came down.

A moment's further fighting ensued, but the animal was evidently spent, through the combined vehemence of his physical effort and his rage. When Nora, hearing the ejaculations of relief about her, uncovered her eyes, it was to see the mystery man ride to the far side of the meadow at a canter, then dismount, speak to the horse, and busy himself over a readjustment of the cinches. With the perspiring, limp-looking Mechdolt, he soon rejoined the party, his mount under entire control.

The day's coursing was not resumed, as it would have been impossible to overtake the greyhounds, by now miles

away, probably chasing some tired-out jack. Juan Valencia was most profuse in his regrets for Colby's untoward struggle. He could not understand what had come over the horse, unless he had been feeding on murder weed. Never had a guest of his been treated so badly.

The Virginian, however, waved away his chagrin, declaring that he had had the finest time of his life. He would not listen to one word against El Viento. Indeed, he was the sole member of the party, including the horse, who did not look utterly collapsed from the episode. There were no very vehement objections when, on their return to the ranch house, the host found himself unable to accompany them back to town in the Pickers' car.

It was when Colby had escorted Nora Saunders from the automobile to the door of the Hidalgo Street home that the girl found the opportunity for a word aside. "How long is it going to take you to dispose of those guns, Mr. Colby?"

Colby looked as startled and hurt as if she had struck him with her crop. "Do you—are you so anxious to see me on my way?"

The girl glanced into the hall of the house; then she leaned toward him. He could see that her lips quivered before she could speak, and that there was a film of tears over the blue of her eyes. "For your own sake, yes," she breathed. Then, before he could stop her, she had entered the hall and closed the door.

Colby stood quite still for a moment, under the spell of the realization that just before disappearing she had clasped his hand in a warm, impulsive pressure.

Mechdolt proposed that they walk together to the plaza, so they parted from the genial English couple.

"That he-leopard had it planned to finish you to-day," said the fat man, after a block or two had been covered

in silence. "El Viento is a man-killer and Valencia knew it. I got it straight from the vaqueros."

Colby fumbled in his waistcoat pocket and produced a small green object covered with needlelike spines. "Don't blame El Viento, Ted; he's a horse after my own heart. I took this cactus bur from underneath the cinch, said cinch being plenty tight. It could scarcely have worked in by accident."

CHAPTER XXI.

A MESSAGE OF UNREST.

PONDERING his problem, which each day became more involved, Colby paced up and down his room, drawing heavily on his calabash. A gray fog hung from the ceiling, for his session of self-communion had lasted since luncheon and it was now the middle of the afternoon. But as often as the ashes in his pipe cooled, Colby refilled with fresh tobacco.

For the noontime meal, he had stopped at the American Club and walked straight into the most insulting rebuff of his life. Wallace Saunders was sitting at the round general table, a vacant chair beside him. Toward this the Virginian walked with a nod of general greeting. But scarcely had he drawn the seat under him when Saunders flung down his napkin and noisily pushed back his own chair.

"Within the last minute I have lost my appetite," he remarked, in a distinct voice, with a glance at the newcomer which none could mistake.

"I—I don't understand you, sir." Colby half started to his feet in amazement.

He was not left long in doubt. "I cannot eat at the same table with a murderer's hireling," declared the peso millionaire, and straightway left the room, his handsome face set and white as paper.

The others at the table tried to gloss

over the unpleasant incident. Saunders was not to be taken seriously, they said, for he was under greater tension than most of them, his fortune hanging by the merest thread. None repeated the term used, "a murderer's hireling," but Colby knew that it was distinct in each mind and that renewed speculation regarding him would be started immediately on his departure.

Calmly reviewing the unexpected affront, he concluded that Valencia must be its direct cause, with Magda Winters behind him. That the charming widow should draw deductions from such admissions as he had purposely permitted to be drawn from him in that tête-à-tête interview was to be expected. That they had been communicated so quickly to the handsome Andalusian, and through him to Saunders, with such drastic effect, was the surprise.

Colby did not blame Magda. The game she was playing for what she must consider royal stakes evidently fascinated her. Especially did leniency toward her move him when he remembered that she was the niece of Cyrus Keating, a man who had made himself an emperor of New York finance through participation in enterprises as daring, if not as dangerous, as this in which his young relative had embarked with Saunders and Valencia. No wonder the Mexican prospect seemed alluring to a blood relative, even though a woman, of the man who had been dubbed "pirate," "buccaneer," and worse until his vast wealth had commanded the use of more respectful terms.

Already she had been moved to defy her uncle. Daily she continued to override poor little Mrs. Knapp, Keating's only sister, who in the steadfastness of her love remained in the hope of saving Magda from herself. In no wise had she spared Teddy Mehdolt, devoted as he was to his determination to make her happy. For more reasons

than one, Colby decided, he must make it his particular business to see that the young adventuress did not unnecessarily burn her dainty fingers.

His particular regret that Saunders had turned against him was not that it made his mission in Mexico more difficult, but centered around the change that must ensue in his relation with the one woman who had so deeply stirred him. Perhaps it would cause a vital break in the heart campaign, which, since bidding Nora farewell in the doorway of her home the previous afternoon, he had determined to bring to an issue in the few days remaining to him. And doubly, with the thought of winning her, did he want the pecuniary reward that success in his mission would bring.

Each hour seemed to make the situation of Americans in Guadalajara more precarious. The resentment of the populace was kindling into flame. The demands of the government for "loans" became more pressing. The strain was telling on both sides. And in the background, constantly edging nearer, was the revolutionary horde. Surely the match would soon be struck that would set off the powder mine! Any hour might prove the appointed one for Colby to act. The opportunity which he had awaited so long, which had so stubbornly refused to be created, might surprise him to-day—to-morrow. Then just one drastic move——

The tramp of feet upon the gallery outside interrupted his reflections. At a knock, he threw open his own door upon the shriveled, ever-bowing Manuel, his parakeet upon his shoulder, and beside him two soldiers in palace uniform.

One of the latter held out the envelope of a cablegram. "This message has just arrive'. We bring him with compliments from Benito Farias, governor of Jalisco."

"I'll bet the old fox has spent hours

trying to read between the lines," Colby remarked to himself; then spoke aloud: "Return my compliments to his excellency, with all due appreciation of this attention and the hope that I may continue in his favor."

Not until after further felicitations, which in Mexico attend the simplest interchange, could the door be closed on the curious faces. Colby opened the envelope and read:

COLBY, *Guadalajara.*

Oscar Dred cannot possibly sail for Vera Cruz. Must remove with all effects immediately to Los Angeles. COLBY.

On its face this seemed an ordinary message. The detailed verbiage, despite the excessive cable and land wire tolls, was not unusual, for, in times when censorship is strict, it is unwise to risk misconception. But its effect upon the recipient was electrical. For a moment he stood in the center of the floor and stared at the neatly penned lines on the printed blank. His brow knitted, then sudden exultation showed in his eyes.

"The die is cast!" he informed the four walls of his room. Flinging into his coat, he hurried from the hotel.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter XXII, following an interesting sketch of all that has gone before, introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out March 1st. It began in the February 1st issue. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

Lacking Possession

BLESSED are the meek," quoted the deacon, in reproving the backslider, "for they shall inherit the earth."

"They may inherit it, all right, deacon," said the irreverent one, "but somehow or other they never seem to get possession."



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

WOEFULLY DEFICIENT.

OF all the round of athletic events at Dwig College, none approached the importance of the annual six-mile ice-skating classic between that institution and Western State College. Skaters were trained with more care than diamond and gridiron stars; their individual stages of preparedness, as the first frost nipped the air, were pre-saged by the local press, and the villagers of the respective towns were stirred almost as much as the collegians concerned.

February 10th is the red-letter day, and as early as October the contestants for a place on the two-man team at Dwig began practice on the indoor track, using roller skates to harden their leg muscles and to acquire the perfect balance that comes only after arduous training.

Among the first to report at Dwig was "Cutey" Devine, a mere shank of a lad whose slight physique had earned

him the nickname. Barely five feet five, with narrow shoulders, as men go, a skin as soft and rosy as a mortal kewpie's, and a tenor-speaking voice, Cutey was a butt for all sorts of jokes on and off the campus. Yet he smiled on in never-failing good humor and continued to try, which eventually won him the respect of all his companions and the particular friendship and admiration of Hubbard Burns, a husky Texan who was indeed worth knowing.

But, though he trained earnestly and faithfully, no one at Dwig expected Cutey to represent the college, because in all of his athletic endeavors he had failed utterly. He had tried out for quarter back on the eleven, but after one week of futile effort he was discarded and dropped from the training table. Undismayed, he went out for track, and, though for a time it looked as if his grit would win a place on the relay, he was outclassed in the final trials. Turning his attention to basket ball, he tried hard, but again his natural weakness caused his downfall when pitted against sturdier companions.

"It's a shame," Hub told him one night in his room. "You've the grit of a full-grown man, but the strength of a yearling."

It was during that consolation party in Cutey's room that Hub first noticed the picture of a very pretty girl on his friend's bureau. Picking it up with the freedom allowed by their close friendship, Hub gazed long into the clear, straightforward eyes that looked at him from the frame.

"My sister Elsie—some kid!" Cutey commented, watching the Texan under half-closed lids.

"Right-o! She sure is a beauty. Why don't you have her up some time?"

"She won't come until I make a place on one of Dwig's teams. Wants to see me compete. In my last letter I told her she'd never witness the beauties of this burg if she waited to gaze on me in a Dwig varsity uniform."

Hub turned the picture over in his hands and started to replace it, but something in Elsie's eyes compelled him to look again. They seemed to regard him with a frank appeal that startled. Finally he set the photograph on the bureau, with the pretty face turned toward him. "Honest, pal, she is there! Something in her eyes sort of knocks me. I'd like to know her, Cutey—that is, if you think I'm fit."

Cutey leaped spontaneously from his chair and slapped his big friend on the back. "There's no man on earth I'd rather have her meet than you, Hub; and she is willing, too." He began rummaging through some letters piled on his worktable. "I can't find the last one, but in it she said she certainly would be pleased to know you. You see, I've been boosting you."

"Did you tell her what I look like?" Hub showed a trace of self-conscious embarrassment. "You know, looks don't count much among us fellows, but a girl is different."

"Sure, I told her all about you."

Cutey paused to note the high cheek bones, rugged skin, and honest blue eyes of his best friend. "Yes, I described you as you are. It's all right. But she won't come to Hyattstown until I win a place on one of our teams, so I reckon there isn't much chance of your seeing her yet a while. However——"

"Yes, there is. I'm going to put you on a team or bust!" Hub regarded Cutey musingly. "With a little coaching, you can tie a pair of ice skates on those legs of yours, wind yourself up, and tick off those six miles around Lakeland faster than any galoot this side of Iceland. And I'm the man to make you do it!"

Hub meant what he said, and started in the following afternoon to make good. Under his guidance Cutey changed his stroke from a short, snappy effort to a long, swinging glide that carried him forward with greater ease, though not so fast at first. With Hub as pacemaker, Cutey reeled off one mile at top speed the first evening, and increased the distance by one hundred yards every evening. In addition to that, he trailed the Texan around the track endlessly at a slow grind that brought out all his latent strength and gradually overcame the fatal nausea that heretofore had always accompanied an extraordinary exertion on his part.

Up at Laurel, home of Western State College, preparations also were being made for the ice meet. There was competition only for one place, as "Shorty" Ellis was selected before he donned a skate. Shorty was in his junior year and was without a doubt the champion of the school. He had beaten all competitors the previous year, including Hubbard Burns, Dwig's one best bet. The villagers who had won money on Shorty were keen for him, and even before the first ice appeared, a group of Laurel residents pooled their money and

offered odds of three to two on their favorite, regardless of who competed for Dwig. There were few takers in Hyattstown, the Dwig followers remembering ruefully the fiasco of the previous February.

Shorty heard that Cutey Devine was trying for a place on Dwig's team, and hoped he would win it, though he, of the same frame of mind as all others, saw no chance for the well-known failure to win anything of an athletic nature. "I'd like to show him up in front of Helena," Shorty confided to himself over and over again.

Helena Ray lived at Sunnyside, a station between Hyattstown and Laurel. It was a mystery to Shorty why any place so unlovely as Sunnyside should be graced with the beauty of the pretty brunette whose smiles he sought with the zealotry of an orchid hunter. As a suitor, Shorty was unparalleled for earnestness, devoting every available minute to her company except on those two evenings each week when Cutey Devine sat beside the wicker lamp in Helena's sitting room and admired her latest needlework—usually an unwearable, gorgeous necktie or a knock-out hatband of a color to enrage a bull.

Shorty worried. He was discontented with the progress of his suit. He had brought to beautiful Helena and laid at her feet all the crowns of Napoleon. His laurels on the athletic fields were of number and caliber fit to adorn the magnificent brow of the Great Stone Face. He was Western State's football captain, anchor man on the relay, ran the century in ten and two-fifths seconds, played shortstop on the nine, and was generally looked upon as a hero. The students worshiped him. But, possibly because others exalted him, Helena turned wistful black eyes over his shoulder and winked slyly at Cutey. Which was irritating and disquieting, to say the least.

As a Romeo, Cutey was woefully

deficient. He would sit through an entire evening with Helena and talk about everything but the tender thoughts supposed to occupy the minds of lovers. Once, and only once, did he attempt to fulfill his rôle, and then Helena was surprised into unconsciously drawing her hand from his caressing grasp, and Cutey never again sought to recover it. He apologized, in fact, for momentarily forgetting himself, and long after he had gone Helena continued to wonder. "He's so different!" she exclaimed, and she seemed rather pleased than otherwise.

CHAPTER II.

WITH A FLOURISH.

ON the morning of February 5th, nine contestants for a chance to represent Dwig lined up on the ice at Lakeland and prepared for the start. The lake was one mile around, and they were required to go six laps. Cutey was there; so was Danny Regan, a spirited little Irish youth whose prowess was well known; and there were many other types, long and short, fat and lean, with as many different strides and as many varied methods of obtaining the best speed.

Cutey looked about for Hub, and, not finding him, asked if any one had seen him. Immediately several excited runners started out to look for Burns, as he was their one hope against Western State and Shorty Ellis. Presently Hub appeared, hobbling on crutches, his right leg held tenderly off the ground. A groan greeted his crippled appearance.

"It's too bad, fellows," Burns told them, "but I sprained my ankle in practice down here last night, and it hurts like the devil. I couldn't think of putting on a skate. Look at it!" They saw that his leg was swollen, even above the bandage.

Cutey came over to express his regret, but Hub cut him short: "Don't

think about me, pal, but about yourself. It puts that much more responsibility on you. Remember what I've taught you—every twist—and go to it. Never mind trying to outskate Danny Regan; he has a place cinched; just follow at his heels and let him come in first, and keep ahead of the others."

The try-out started. The nine skaters got away in a bunch, but at the end of the first hundred yards Danny Regan was leading, swinging along with an easy abandon that brought a cheer from the watchers. Cutey Devine, intent upon doing as Hub had taught him, trailed a few yards behind Regan, without attempting to pass him.

Helena Ray was a spectator, and came over to stand by Hub. Cutey saw her and smiled as he whizzed by on the first lap, and she waved encouragement to him.

"Gamest kid in the school, Cutey!" Hub exclaimed.

"Yes, but so different from the others. Don't you think so?"

"I reckon. Say! Look at them flying!" Hub pointed excitedly as Danny and Cutey swept around the far end of the lake, neck and neck, and came toward them. Regan was smiling from ear to ear, and Cutey, clipping along at his side, waved a flippant hand in demonstration of his freedom from anxiety.

The third time around, Regan began to draw away from Cutey, who seemed to let down, and that position was held throughout the balance of the race until the last fifty yards, when suddenly, to the surprise of all, Dwig's athletic failure speeded up, and, amid a silence broken only by the sharp click, click of the skates, gained inch by inch on Danny and crossed the line upon Regan's heels before the broken tape ends struck the ice. Behind them, the field was strung out for a mile, the closest competitor finishing a full minute behind Cutey.

"Congratulations!" Hub exclaimed, as Devine glided back, breathing hard, but happy. Helena Ray offered her hand, which he took and held a second, smiling into her black eyes.

On their way to the gymnasium, Hub was obviously struggling with something within him demanding expression. At last he burst forth anxiously: "She'll come now, won't she?"

"Elsie? You bet! I'll wire her to be here for the masquerade Friday night."

"Good! You did nobly to-day, pal. I timed you—only two minutes behind Shorty's record. If you can start that spurt a little sooner on Saturday, you'll stand a good chance of copping the bacon."

"That's a big thing to say, Hub, but I'm going to break a leg, if necessary, trying to beat him. If I do well, it'll be because of your coaching."

"Nonsense! All the coaching in the world won't make something out of nothing. You've got the nerve. If you had my heft, you'd be competing in the next Olympic games." He changed the subject abruptly. "I'm going to like your sister, Cutey. I hope she likes me. There's something in her face that reminds me of you—a sort of frank expression that knocks me."

"She'll like you, I'm sure, Hub. Well, so long." Cutey turned off and entered the gym, and Hub continued across the campus, thinking deeply.

As soon as the Texan entered his room, he cast aside his crutches with a flourish and flopped comfortably onto the bed, kicking his feet over his head with extraordinary freedom from pain.

"I doped it straight," he mused contentedly. "If I had raced, Regan and I would have won, and Cutey would have been frozen out—and Elsie wouldn't come!" He kicked his feet up again. "It's pretty tough not to get a crack at Shorty, but Cutey's got to

have his chance—and I want to see Elsie. Friday night can't come soon enough for me."

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION.

HYATTSTOWN HALL was gayly decorated Friday evening before the race. In addition to the local participants in the masquerade, many of the Western State crowd came down. Helena Ray was there, and, of course, Shorty Ellis. Girls and youths had gone to every extreme to improvise new and unique costumes, and the whirling maze of vivid colors and striking effects gave the appearance of a miniature New Orleans Mardi Gras. Above the buzz of voices and occasional outbursts of laughter twanged the snappy notes of a dance played by grinning darkies.

Limping slightly, but without crutches, Hubbard Burns, disguised as an Italian laborer, made his way in and out of the lane of dancers, looking for a profile he thought he would recognize under any mask. Presently a firm hand was laid on his arm.

"Good evening, Hub."

He looked down into a pair of large, brown eyes that twinkled up at him through the slits in a Little Red Riding-hood that completely enveloped the wearer. Taken by surprise, Hub found his tongue glued to the roof of his mouth. He tried to speak, but gasped instead. The pretty speech he had prepared for the occasion slipped away through his toes. It was natural, inevitable, a disease affecting men the world over, hardy Texans not excepted.

"Don't you know me?" The girl's voice was mockingly petulant. "I recognized you instantly from my brother's letters."

In some manner Hub unshackled the invisible chains binding his vocal organs, and in a moment they were swing-

ing happily along in the rhythm of an old-fashioned waltz, injected for novelty. Elsie was a good dancer, and Hub forgot about his "sprained" ankle in the ecstasy of guiding her lithe, responsive young body through the intricacies of the ever-forming and disintegrating pockets.

"I thought you were lame—my brother said so," Elsie remarked, after a moment's silence.

"I was lame," Hub explained recklessly; "for the occasion. You see, Cutey said you wouldn't come here until he was on one of Dwig's teams, and by spraining my ankle I kept out of the competition. Understand? I wanted you to come—even at the expense of an ankle!"

"And much personal glory," she added, tightening her hold a little. "It was splendid of you, but can my brother do well to-morrow? He won't disgrace Dwig?"

"Do well? Since Monday, when the trials were held, Cutey has improved wonderfully. I believe he can skate rings around me now."

"He seems to be quite attentive to the Snow Queen to-night. Is that Miss Ray?"

Hub looked in the direction she indicated and saw a peddler dancing with the fairy Snow Queen. He had not known the disguise adopted by Cutey, but now that Elsie had indicated her brother, he recognized the familiar movements of his friend. As he watched, Hub saw something that Elsie had not noticed. A short, heavy-set cow-puncher stood near the door, his eyes following the movements of the Snow Queen and the peddler with unfailing gaze. The cow-puncher was Shorty Ellis, and in the pose of the man Hub detected danger for Cutey.

It came sooner than he expected. The peddler had been dancing with the queen through three numbers, and Shorty's attempts to break in had been

unsuccessful. At last the jealous suitor, irritated beyond control, caught the peddler's arm as he passed the door and halted him. Hub immediately guided Elsie toward the door, to be prepared to render assistance to his friend, if necessary.

Alarmed, Helena drew away, and her companion followed Shorty outside: Excusing himself, Hubbard Burns followed them, leaving Elsie standing just inside the door. The Texan did not hear the first exchange of words, but as he stepped out he saw Shorty strike viciously. To Hub's surprise, the peddler ducked neatly, straightened swiftly, and landed a well-directed blow on Shorty's chin, toppling him. It was done quickly and scientifically.

Hub congratulated Cutey, who seemed to regret the occurrence and insisted upon helping Shorty to his feet. Much pleased and chuckling, the Texan returned to the dance floor to find Elsie, but Little Red Riding-hood had vanished, and after fruitlessly circling the room, he came back to the porch, but Cutey had gone.

A block away he saw the hurrying figure of the cow-puncher pass under an arc light, and a moment later two other persons moved stealthily after him. He had only a glimpse of the shadowers, but in that flash he recognized Elsie and her brother. Hub's first thought was to follow, but on reflection he decided that he was not needed, else they would have asked him to go with them. Then the Westerner returned to the hall, which seemed strangely vacant and lonesome now.

CHAPTER IV.

WITHOUT WARNING.

THE lake gleamed in the winter sunlight. The smooth, bluish surface stretched from the trolley line far off to a grove of magnificent pines. The course was marked by red flags on the

ice. At the start were bunched hundreds of enthusiastic fans, and around the course stretched a triple line of rooters, some on skates, some afoot and dragging children on sleds. The air was biting cold beneath a clear sky. Now and then cheering started in sections, and the solid-blue pennants of Western State waved good-natured defiance to the orange and black of Dwig College.

A ripple of applause spread as the four contestants appeared, bundled in overcoats. As they stripped for action, the slight figure of Cutey Devine stood out in contrast to his husky competitors. Danny Ryan, full of vigor and fight, skated nervously back and forth at the starting line, eager for the race. Shorty Ellis, wearing a blue jersey and the white initials "W. S." on his chest, stood at one side, eying Cutey, who was being prepared by Hubbard Burns. Shorty had been told on Tuesday of Cutey's excellent speed in the trials, and at the time he seemed to be considerably worried, but now his old confidence had returned and he waited quietly.

"Now, remember, Cutey," Hub was telling his protégé, "a long, easy stride. Don't let your muscles tighten. If you strain in the first five miles, you're lost. Take it easy until I signal."

Cutey lifted himself lightly to his feet and stretched his arms. He was nervous and wanted to yawn continually. This was his first chance to represent Dwig in any line of sport, after many discouraging and futile trials, and he was anxious to make good.

The stentorian voice of the starter called them to the line. There was no dickering for places. Cutey selected the center, next to Ryan. Talking ceased, and the crowd waited. Leaning against the rope, more beautiful than ever with the sting of frost on her cheeks and the fire of excitement in her eyes, Helena Ray signaled a greet-

ing to Shorty and then to Cutey. Each youth responded smilingly and then turned his serious attention to the race. Those who knew of the rivalry between Shorty and Cutey took their cue from the situation and called sotto-voce encouragement: "Eat him up, Shorty!" "Go to it, Cutey!" Neither man replied. The starter raised his revolver, hesitated a moment, then fired. Like pieces of machinery under control of one lever, the four skaters left the mark, legs moving in easy unison. A roar came from the crowd, and flags and bunting waved a mute, heterogeneous acclamation.

As the noise died down, the click, click of the runners could be distinctly heard over the entire course. As the quartet took the first turn to the left, Jimmy Arden, of Western State, pulled away, setting a fast pace. Danny Ryan, impetuous and confident of his strength, took up the pursuit; but Cutey, wise because of Hub's coaching, stayed back and stroked steadily behind Shorty Ellis.

Yard by yard Arden pulled away, and close upon his heels sped Ryan, eager and willing to keep up the pace. Thus they were at the end of the first mile, Arden leading a mad rush over the line with Ryan at his heels and Shorty and Cutey coming on fifty yards behind.

Occasionally Shorty turned and sneered over his shoulder at Cutey, who ignored him. There was no time for personalities. He had his hands full maintaining the easy pace Hubbard Burns had taught him, the lithe, swinging movement of the tiger that conserved strength while giving speed. On they swept, the cheers swelling in their ears as they passed until it seemed that they moved in air charged with sound. The second mile was passed, and Jimmy Arden had increased his lead to one hundred yards, with Ryan still holding on.

As they swept into the third mile, Shorty, smiling grimly, suddenly increased his stroke and began to draw away from his rival. To overcome the lead would mean changing his stride, and, remembering his directions, Cutey allowed the Western State man to pull away. As he passed the crowd, Cutey looked appealingly at Hub, who raised one finger as a signal to speed it up a little more.

Following the direction, Cutey shortened his stroke, and instantly began to crawl up on Shorty. Arden and Ryan were now far ahead of them. Cutey began to worry, but as he entered the fifth mile Hub signaled with two fingers, meaning still more speed, and, with the feeling of being released from a chain, Cutey again shortened his stride and came almost abreast of Shorty before the finish line again came in sight.

Sweeping into the last mile, Jimmy Arden began to waver. It was expected. His had been a fine sacrifice, and now he heard Shorty coming on for the final dash. Ryan, too, was fagged, but struggled gamely to keep his speed.

The first quarter was ripped off, and like a breath of wind Shorty passed Ryan and his college mate, followed closely by Cutey Devine.

"Don't lose him, Cutey!" Ryan cried, as he saw the slender Dwigg man whiz by, and, though he was intensely occupied with the race, Cutey nodded his head grimly.

Passing the half mile, Shorty bore ahead, his straining eyes measuring the distance to the finish. His skate struck a slight obstruction and he wavered an instant. Cutey closed the gap to a distance of ten yards. Shorty's confident leer had vanished. His face was white and tired. His eyes bulged.

The crowd about the course, aroused to a degree of excitement passing all mastery, gave vent to wild, continuous cries of encouragement. Men

whose money was bet on Shorty twisted their hands deeply in their pockets. Girls poised on tiptoe and waited, mouths open expectantly.

Far down the course, Hubbard Burns stood waiting, a handkerchief in his hand. Subconsciously Cutey began to realize the great responsibility resting upon him. He did not see the crowd, only an indistinct blur. He did not see the man directly in front of him. His eyes, bloodshot and straining, were focused on that white handkerchief in the hand of his friend. All at once he realized his dependence on Hub Burns, and under his breath he kept saying: "Good old Hub! Good old Hub!"

They were in the last quarter mile. Suddenly Hub raised his arm, and the white handkerchief fluttered out against a background of blue and orange and black. Cutey saw it, and a tingle of new life rushed into his tired body.

"I've got you, Shorty!" he muttered, and began his spurt, the sprint that Hub had discovered he was capable of bringing to life when mere muscles were on the point of collapse.

Shorty Ellis heard the increasing, choppy strokes, and seemed to feel that he was beaten. He struck out wildly, blindly, swerving slightly from the course. They were in the last fifty yards. A feeling of exultation was rising in Cutey's throat, for he saw victory. Then suddenly, without warning, a cry broke from Shorty's lips, one arm went up, and the Western State star plunged downward into the cold water of the lake.

To the crowd's amazement and indignation, Cutey whizzed past into the stretch and finished easily, without even looking back over his shoulder. When he did turn around, Ryan and Arden were dragging Shorty from the water.

A strange sound arose, like a vicious breeze blowing through a keyhole. Cutey looked around. The crowd was

hissing him. Some one pushed him in the back and nearly knocked him down.

"Ye won, dern ye, but it wasn't fair! You're a coward!" The speaker was a muddy-heeled farmer. Others took up his slogan, and "Coward!" was flung at Cutey from every direction. Not a sympathetic face in the throng. Every one's eyes blazed at him. Shorty was the hero. Hundreds of overcoats were offered him, and people cheered as he passed. To them he was the winner. His failing strength was forgotten. They saw only the cowardice of the man who skated on while his rival floundered in the water.

Helena Ray swept past Cutey with head held high and eyes aglow with disdain. She did not speak to him, and as he watched her go to Shorty's side, a slow, enigmatical smile formed on Cutey's lips.

Hubbard Burns, faithful to the last, came to Cutey and guided him through the crowd. The Texan spoke only once, and that was when they parted at the dormitories. "I'm glad I couldn't find your sister on the ice. I'd have had a hard time explaining why you went on after Shorty's accident. I never coached you to do that, pal."

"There's a reason—and Elsie understands," Cutey replied, and, strangely enough, his unsportsmanlike act did not seem to bother him.

CHAPTER V.

IN SILENT APPRAISAL.

THE lake was thronged with skaters after supper that night. Shorty and Helena Ray were together, the girl happy and proud when people turned to look at her partner. But Shorty was not happy; his eyes were worried and his laughter false.

On the outskirts of the crowd stood a modishly attired, very pretty little blond girl accompanied by a young man about her own size, who carried two

suit cases. They were searching the throng for some one. Suddenly the girl placed a hand on her companion's arm and indicated with a nod the approach of Shorty and Helena. "I've got to tell you, Helena," Shorty was saying, as they approached. "I'm not only a liar, but a cheat as well." He spoke with the determination of one about to make a clean breast of a bad mess. "Cutey won that race fairly and squarely," he went on, "I was done for, and he would have passed me the next second."

"I doubt it. You had been leading all the way, and, besides, it was very unsportsmanlike of him not to lend you a hand. The race would have been declared off if he had stopped. He had nothing to lose if he could outskate you."

"That's why I cheated!" Shorty exclaimed, in impulsive self-condemnation. "I know you'll despise me when I tell you, but——"

The youth with the suit cases dropped them and stepped forward quickly. Helena and Shorty recognized Cutey Devine. "Pardon, Ellis," he said, "but may I have a word with you? I couldn't help hearing what you two were saying."

Shorty and Helena looked annoyed, but they followed him. He led them to where his sister was standing beside the suit cases. Hubbard Burns, bashful but persistent, had come from somewhere and was addressing her. "I've been looking for you, Elsie, waiting for a chance to speak to you," Hub was saying.

The girl greeted him warmly: "I'm glad you came. I missed you on the course, and I want you to know that my brother isn't the coward you probably believe him to be." Her bright eyes sparkled mischievously as Cutey approached with Shorty and Helena. "Tell them, Miles."

Cutey took a deep breath and grinned into Hub's eager face. "I don't think Old Socks believes me cowardly; he's just puzzled." He turned to Ellis. "Shorty," he said soberly, "when Elsie and I followed you from the masquerade last night and saw you cut away the ice for your fake accident, in case you realized you were beaten to-day, I had my doubts as to your manliness, but just now, when inadvertently I heard you start to confess the trick to Helena, and give me proper credit, I knew I was mistaken."

He took his rival's hand. The Western State man was dumfounded. Words failed him; then he left them, mumbling something incoherently expressive of his astonishment and appreciation. Helena went with him, but first she extended her hand to Cutey and gave that young man a glance that set his heart bounding.

Cutey then turned to Burns, whose usually impassive face was alive with surging emotion. "Hub, you've made me a winner against tremendous odds, and I'm deeply appreciative. The crowd's against me now, but I'll wipe that out later with a less clouded victory. I'm so grateful, Hub, I'll do anything you want."

The big Texan cleared his throat. His heavy hands clasped those of Cutey in solid friendship. "You're right, pal, I was only puzzled at your behavior. You're game to the core! There's only one thing I'll ask of you——" He lowered his voice and peeped slyly at Elsie, who was watching him in silent appraisal of his virtues. "Just leave us alone a while," Hub finished in a whisper.

"You're on!" Cutey responded readily. "So long, sis; I'll see you later."

He picked up the suit cases and walked away, smiling to himself.

Puzzles for Two — ^{By} Burt L. Standish.



(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

NOT WHOLLY CHEATED.



HAVING followed the girl along the path, with the stealthy step of a panther tracking its prey, Babson paused and watched her when she foolishly ventured out to the very edge of a high cliff. He saw her bend far over and look downward at the placid sea that, in full flood and about to turn, was lapping softly against the smooth base of the perpendicular rock. Her figure was slender and graceful. The summer sunshine shimmered on her bronze-colored hair.

"I hope she falls!" thought Babson.

As if the wish in his heart had given her a sharp thrust that caused her to lose her balance, she suddenly lurched outward and fell, uttering a scream.

Babson leaped forward. He was dressed in light flannels, and he did not have to stop to remove a garment. He felt that there was no time to waste. And in his great hurry he also lost his

balance, his feet slipping beneath him as he plunged from the top of the cliff. As a result, instead of diving cleanly into the water, he turned over awkwardly in the air and struck the surface flat upon his stomach with an impact that quite knocked his breath out of him. He sank.

Next thing Babson knew he was choking, strangling, gasping for air, and somebody or something seemed to be trying to remove his scalp by tearing it loose by main force. Expelling a small part of the ocean that had been seeking to pour down his throat, he managed to gulp in a somewhat painful breath, wondering the while what was happening to him.

"Be quiet!" said a calm and musical voice. "If you don't kick or struggle, I can get you out. If you do kick, I'll have to hit you on the temple to stun you. Don't grab at me unless you want to get hit."

It was the girl. She had him by the hair of the head, in which manner she had brought him back to the surface.

She was astonishingly cool and apparently quite able to take care of herself—and him, too. This was what his attempt at a gallant rescue had brought him to! Babson felt very foolish and ridiculous. Being still rather helpless from the shock of the impact that had knocked the breath out of him, he made no immediate effort to help himself.

"That's right," she said. "That's sensible. If I could feel sure you wouldn't grab me round the neck, I'd let you put your hands on my shoulders. I could support you that way and be free to swim with both hands at the same time."

"I won't grab you," promised Babson wheezily and meekly.

When his hands were on her shoulders, the girl struck out, swimming strongly and easily in spite of her short skirt. She kept at a safe distance from the base of the cliff, although the movement of the tide was so sluggish that there was little danger that it would wash them against it.

"You're a good swimmer," said Babson admiringly.

"Don't worry," she answered. "I am."

"It's quite a long distance to some place where we can land."

"All right. Don't be afraid. I'll get you there."

Babson was not afraid; he was chagrined. Instead of rescuing her, he was being rescued by her. The whole affair had gone wrong.

"I think you had better let me go, and take care of yourself," he said. "Just now I'd a little rather drown than not."

"Don't be silly!" she flung back at him. "Keep your hands on my shoulders."

There was a pause during which she made steady progress with regular and powerful strokes. His wonderment at the strength and skill of such a slender creature grew.

"I can swim, too," he stated presently.

"If you swim as well as you dive," she returned, "you'll get your wish and drown, as sure as you try it."

That cut deeply. "I slipped when I jumped from the top of the cliff," he protested. "I'll show you that I can swim!"

He had now fully regained his breath. Removing his hands from her shoulders, he forged along beside her. She watched him a moment, and then a whimsical little smile curved her full lips. An odd, dancing light of impishness seemed to flicker in her blue eyes.

"You *do* swim very well," she admitted. "That makes it much easier."

"For you, but not for me," said Babson. "I thought I was going to rescue you from drowning, and my expectations were stepped on. Fate cheated me." He tried to smile back at her, but there was keen disappointment in that smile.

They swam along side by side. The perpendicular face of the cliff was left behind. Ahead of them, at some distance, was a cleft among the rocks, where they could land and climb upward to the path.

"You seem to feel downcast over it," the girl remarked after a time.

"Why not? I pictured myself as a life-saver and a hero. That picture is turned toward the wall. I'm merely a joke. There's only one compensation."

"What's that?"

"I've found a chance to speak to you. For a week I've been trying for that, but I couldn't discover or devise any way of breaking through the ice of your exclusiveness and reserve. I was getting pretty desperate, Miss Burke."

Again he caught the flicker of that dancing light of impishness in her eyes as she glanced toward him. There was something about it both fascinating and puzzling. That, however, was not strange; from the very first he had been

captivated by this mysterious and distant girl who had seemed so utterly unapproachable.

Suddenly she gave a little gasp, uttered a faint cry, ceased to go forward with steady strokes, and twisted round in the water in an oddly contorted way. Her face seemed contracted by pain.

"What is it?" Babson asked quickly, turning toward her.

"Cramp," she answered. "Oh! It—it's caught me in the side. I can't——"

He had reached her. "Steady!" he said. "Don't struggle, please. I'll get you——. By Jove!"

Babson made a grab at her as she went under, and brought her back to the surface. To his amazement, she seemed to try to clasp him about the shoulders with her arms, and he had to make an effort to hold her off. It was no simple matter, at that. As if the cramp had wholly robbed her of coolness and reason, she continued to struggle.

He begged her to listen. He pleaded with her, tried to reason with her. She got hold of him and dragged his head under, but he broke her hold quickly. Nevertheless, in some way she continued to baffle his efforts to get such a hold upon her clothing as would enable him to continue to swim toward the cleft and carry her along.

"I'm afraid I've got to be rough with you," he said finally.

Her bronze-colored hair was swirling about her shoulders in a wet and tangled mass. Into it Babson fastened the grip of one powerful hand, and was able to hold her off while he fought his way steadily toward the cleft. As he drew near that spot her struggles subsided, and he was relieved when he was able to lift her out without dragging her forth from the water by the hair of her head.

The girl lay limp and dripping upon the wet rocks, her eyes closed. After resting a little to recover his breath,

Babson picked her up in his arms and began to climb up through the cleft toward the path.

CHAPTER II.

A SHOCK TO VANITY.

WHEN the path was reached, Babson lowered her to the ground. It had been a hard climb with such a load, and he was breathing just a trifle more quickly than usual. An ordinarily strong and healthy man would have been panting and done up, quite.

Miss Burke sat up and looked at him. "You must be in fine condition," she said. "I didn't think you could do it."

The flush in Babson's cheeks deepened a little. "Are you feeling all right now?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Babson."

"You know my name!"

"You know mine."

"I took pains to learn it the first day I saw you."

"That was——"

"Tuesday, a week ago."

"That's the day I heard the clerk at the hotel call you Mr. Babson," the girl told him, and he fancied he again caught a flicker of impishness in her eyes.

"And you—you remembered it," he stammered. "I'm surprised and—and flattered."

"I was practically forced to remember it. I encountered you every turn I made. I couldn't seem to make a move without meeting you. Really, Mr. Babson, you did it very badly."

His color grew deeper. "I presume I did," he admitted; "but I couldn't find anybody to introduce me to you. You didn't seem to have a single acquaintance at the hotel except the grim, middle-aged lady who seems to be your bodyguard. If her eyes were daggers, I'd have been dead some days ago."

"Aunt Myra isn't disposed to look with favor on strange young men."

"How did you escape from her today? It's the first time I've known her to let you get out of her sight."

"I knew you'd be watching for me, and I wanted to see if you would follow me. I told her to stay in her room."

"You—you told her! And she minded you?"

"She always does."

"And you wanted to see if I would follow you!" exclaimed Babson. "I'll be—hanged!"

Miss Burke bowed her head suddenly, putting her hand to her side.

"The cramp?" Babson questioned solicitously. "You are feeling it still?"

"Not at all," she replied, her shoulders, over which her wet hair was flowing, shaking a little. "It's all right now." But her voice was oddly choked.

"I'm very sorry," said Babson. "I know I've been a wretched nuisance. I know I've annoyed you. I admit that my manners have been execrable. And I did follow you, like a—like a cad. Now you know just the sort of person I am. No, you don't! While I'm about it, I'll 'fess up the whole business. I'm a brute! I watched you go out upon that cliff. I knew it was dangerous when you went so near the edge. I should have warned you. I didn't. I hoped you'd fall over, just exactly the way you did."

Miss Burke continued to keep her head bent, her hand pressed to her side, her shoulders moving slightly.

"I was determined to make your acquaintance somehow," Babson went on desperately. "I thought if you fell into the sea I could rescue you, and then you'd simply have to know me and let me talk to you. I wanted you to fall, and you fell. I feel now as if I had pushed you from the cliff."

She looked up at him. She was laughing. "I didn't fall," she said; "I jumped. I merely pretended to fall."

Again the breath was quite knocked

out of Babson. His mouth open, he stared at her.

All at once she stopped laughing. "It was rather a shabby trick, wasn't it?" she said contritely.

Babson gulped. "You jumped! What for?"

"To see if you would jump after me. I wanted an adventure. Goodness knows it's dull enough around here! And I wanted to find out what sort of stuff you were made of. I didn't expect you to flop down all sprawling, if you jumped at all, and get the wind knocked out of you."

"That happened because I was in such a hurry to dive in after you. I give you my word, that's not my usual style of diving. Under normal conditions, I can do it better than that."

"I'll take your word for it," she agreed. "You really proved that you were an excellent swimmer after—when I——"

"When you were taken with that cramp," he finished. "Thank fortune! Only for that, I'd be ashamed ever again to look at my image in a mirror. If I knew you better, I think I'd scold you now. You see how foolish it was for you to take such a chance and jump off the cliff. If I hadn't followed you, and if I hadn't been a fairly good swimmer, you would have drowned, you know."

Again the girl concealed her face by bowing her head, and again Babson saw her shoulders moving. A sudden and horrible suspicion assailed him. His lips closed, and, although he was at most times a good-looking young man, his face became somewhat unpleasant of aspect.

"I think," he said coldly, "that you are laughing at me, Miss Burke."

Her shoulders shook still more.

"Go on!" he urged. "Complete my humiliation! Tell me you didn't have a cramp at all!"

Miss Burke sprang up and stood be-

fore him. "I'm really sorry!" she declared, suppressing the laughter she had sought in vain to hold entirely in check. "But you seemed to feel so dreadfully cut up because you had made such a fizzle of your attempt to rescue me. I did it from impulse. I thought I'd make you feel better. And I wanted to see how you'd do it. I wondered if you would try to stun me with your fist to stop me from struggling. You know I threatened to do that to you. But you didn't strike me."

"I didn't have to," Babson returned harshly. "If I had thought it absolutely necessary, I would have done so."

"I didn't mean to let you know I had fooled you about that. Now you're angry, and I suppose you have a right to be. You see, I'm a very shameless and unreliable girl. I know what you think of me."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Then you've got me beaten; I don't know what I think of you."

Babson was gazing at her steadily, his lips narrowed a trifle, his grim face unrelaxed. Somehow his manner awed her a little.

"If you'll be good enough to walk back to the hotel with me——" Miss Burke began, almost timidly. "I'm dripping, and I don't want to make explanations to anybody. I'll have to ask you to be obliging enough to do that—if it isn't asking too much."

"Very well."

The path was narrow. Babson followed her. Her wet clothing clung to her supple, slender figure; her dripping hair flowed down her back. She walked on steadily, her head bowed a little. By a rare chance, they did not meet anybody on the way.

The path grew wider before they came in sight of the hotel and the cottages of Pine Point, and Babson quickened his stride, coming up beside her.

"Miss Burke," he said, "you must think I'm a pretty poor sport. I guess I deserved all that came to me. I've annoyed you, but you've had your laugh at me. I suppose I must be rather vain, and so it hurt my pride. However, even if I am vain, I'm not a very good liar, and I told you the truth about trying to meet you in a legitimate way. Now you've seen me fail to take a joke gracefully, and you've got my measure. Of course I know what you must think of me."

"Do you?" she asked, a faint smile curving her lips.

"Why—yes," he hesitated.

"Then you've got me beaten," she answered, in his own words. "I don't know. Let's walk faster. People will be staring at us in a minute."

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING THAT WAS HIDDEN.

ROGER BABSON and Ruth Burke sat on the broad veranda of the Pine Point Hotel and chatted. Near at hand, grim as the Sphinx, sat Ruth's aunt, engaged upon some fancywork. Fortunately she was a trifle deaf. That she did not fully approve of the growing intimacy between her niece and a good-looking young man whom nobody seemed to know anything about seemed indicated by her occasional sharp and frowning glances at the pair.

Farther away sat a small group of the women guests of the hotel. They were prim and proper persons. Most of them were quite elderly. A glance at this group would have enlightened any one as to why the Pine Point Hotel was familiarly known as "The Old Ladies' Home." At this moment, with their heads rather close together and their voices discreetly subdued, they were industriously hunting for scandal.

"And for the past two days they've been together almost *all* the time," gurgled Mrs. Higgins, a fleshy and asth-

matic widow. "I'd like to know who ever introduced them."

"My dear," said Mrs. Topple, a long-nosed and angular person, "such people do not *have* to be introduced. They just get acquainted."

"Terrible!" murmured Miss Pierce, an anæmic and colorless old maid. "Shocking!"

"I think," said Miss Perkins, the schoolmistress, tipping her head to gaze over her spectacles, "that I was the first one around here to see them together. They came from the direction of the cliffs, and both were wringing wet. When I tried to find out what had happened, I was told that they had decided to go in bathing and couldn't wait to get their bathing suits. The idea!"

"And that's all, so far as I know, that anybody has been told about it," wheezed Mrs. Higgins indignantly. "Of course it's preposterous."

"I'm absolutely convinced," put in Mrs. Barlow, who had a firm jaw and a flinty eye, "that that girl is a clever and designing creature, and it's quite probable that she has a past. If not, why doesn't somebody know something about her? I think she's an actress. She registered from New York."

"Isn't it terrible for such a person actually to take possession of the only single man in the hotel?" remarked Miss Pierce, sighing. "And him such a fine-looking, gentlemanly young man, too!"

"But who knows anything about him except that he registered from New York, also?" demanded Mrs. Barlow. "He behaved queer, keeping off by himself all the time, before he met her. I'm absolutely convinced that there's something wrong with *him*. Perhaps he's an absconder or something like that."

At that moment Miss Burke was saying: "There is no doubt, Mr. Babson, but that you are guilty of encouraging crime, at least."

"Perhaps that is true," Babson admitted, without the least shame, even with a brazen show of mild amusement; "but I contend that you are equally guilty. We are both accessories."

He did not falter beneath the reproving gaze of her blue eyes, and presently she laughed lightly.

"Slander," she said, "is punishable by law, and I doubt if those ladies yonder have left either of us a shred of character. We've encouraged them in their defamations; therefore, as you say, I suppose we're accessories to the crime. Why, you've never even told *me* anything in particular about yourself. What black secret are you hiding?"

"Listen," he urged, with a mock air of seriousness. "If I must admit it to you, I was born of poor but honest parents. Both are dead. A doting aunt, who had a little money, sent me to college, where I learned a great many things which I have since found to be useless and impractical. My aunt invested in a land boom that blew up, and died penniless. Therefore, having got my sheepskin, I found that I'd got to get out and hustle.

"Instead of being eminently qualified to succeed in business life," Babson went on, "as I fancied I was, I found myself well prepared to fizzle. I tried several things and failed. Presently, however, I did go into something for which I had no taste whatever, and made a success at it. It was so distasteful to me, however, that I got out of it—quit is the word. Now I'm taking a vacation; resting up a bit before I try something else. That," he concluded, "is the shameful story of my guilty career. And now don't you think that you——"

Miss Burke shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Isn't it awfully tame not to have anything really shocking to tell about oneself?" She laughed. "I'm

merely the daughter of a retired professor. I've been attending boarding school. My father is determined that I shall go to college. Like you, I'm spending part of my vacation here. That's all."

They looked at each other almost dejectedly. After a moment she spoke again: "I had hoped for something more interesting from you. Twice I caught you reading the sporting page of that New York paper in your pocket. I thought that perhaps a man who was interested in such things——"

Babson flushed a little. "At college I was interested in sports. I played football and did other things. I always read the sporting page in my paper."

"When I found you here, a little while ago, you were reading about a prize fight, weren't you?" Miss Burke inquired.

"Yes," he admitted. "I always read that stuff, too."

"So that must interest you. What do you think of prize fighting?"

"It's a brutal game."

"The men who follow it—what about them?"

"Many of them are brutal. Such a profession can't help being demoralizing. It'll degrade any one who sticks to it."

She turned her head to glance away across the blue water to where a distant steamer was trailing a smudge of smoke against the cloudless sky. Babson watched her uneasily.

Presently she looked back and put out her hand. "Will you let me look at that paper?" she asked.

Babson took it out of his pocket and passed it to her with slight reluctance.

"Let me see," she said. "I think this is what you were reading: 'Sandy Maguire knocked out Hungry Goff in the fourth round of the bout at the Hercules Athletic Club last night. Afterward he issued a standing challenge to

Mysterious Jack Doyle, who defeated him six weeks ago. No one seems to know what has become of Doyle. He just disappeared, Tex Clifton, Doyle's manager, declares that he hasn't the remotest idea what has become of his former star. According to Tex, Mysterious Jack swore that he was done with the game, and——'"

"That must be highly pleasant and diverting reading for you, Miss Burke," said Babson.

"I'm trying to discover what you found so interesting in it," she returned, looking at him searchingly.

Babson felt his cheeks burning. "Perhaps I couldn't make that clear to you. All sorts and conditions of men read the fight stuff in the papers."

"Even when they think it a demoralizing and degrading business and prize fighters brutal?"

"Well, perhaps—perhaps some do, even when they think that."

Ruth's aunt had put up her fancy-work. She shivered a little. "I'm getting chilly in this breeze," she said. "I think I'll go in. Don't you think you had better come, Ruth?"

The girl arose. "Yes, Aunt Myra," she answered, "I think I will."

Babson stood up. "I believe I'll go for a walk along the cliffs," he said.

"Be careful," advised Ruth, moving away with her aunt. "It's dangerous."

Babson watched them enter the hotel. "Dished!" he muttered bitterly under his breath. "How she got wise I can't imagine; but now she's got my number and knows just what to think of me. My name is Dennis."

CHAPTER IV.

WITH POLITE REGRETS.

BABSON did not go for a walk along the cliff path; instead, he turned in the opposite direction and walked over to Spring Cove Harbor, three miles away. He reached the Harbor in

time to stroll down to the wharf and watch the afternoon boat from Portland come in.

As usual, a considerable number of villagers went down to the wharf for the same purpose. At this season of the year, the arrival of the afternoon boat was an event of some importance in Spring Cove.

Somewhat gloomily Babson watched the passengers coming down the gangplank. Most of them appeared to be vacationists; persons of moderate or limited means seeking a summer outing some place where the expenses would not too quickly drain their purses.

At the end of the gangplank stood Silly Jim, a well-known village character, grinning, bobbing, and welcoming each arrival, just as he had done daily for years. Practically everybody who had ever visited Spring Cove knew Jim, but nobody minded him. He was quite harmless.

A husky, broad-shouldered young man came striding down the plank like a person in a hurry. He carried a small hand grip and more than six feet of bone and muscle. His clothes were new, ill fitting, and palpably ready-made. Weather-tanned and horny-handed, he was, nevertheless, good looking in a coarse way. But he had a brutal jaw and an eye that might be described as "bad."

His jaw drooping, Silly Jim stared. "Whew!" he said. "What a whopper! Howdy, Mr. Big Feller!"

"Get outter the way, you poor simp!" snapped the huge stranger, giving Jim a shove that would have sent him sprawling had not a villager grabbed him and held him up.

Through the crowd the big man elbowed his way roughly. Looking on, Roger Babson felt his hands clench and his muscles grow taut. The desire to teach the fellow a lesson was something that he restrained with great difficulty at that moment. He did not wish, how-

ever, to attract special attention to himself. Notoriety was something he wished at present to avoid. Nevertheless, he could not resist the impulse to follow the man.

At the far side of the wharf were several public carriages, two motor cars, and the Pine Point jitney bus. Already the latter was pretty well filled up. There was only one seat left, and a hesitating old lady was talking with Abel Groves, who drove the jitney.

"Yes, ma'am," Groves was saying, "I go right past the Hempford Cottage. Get in."

The big fellow who had thrust Silly Jim aside shouldered past the old lady and climbed into the vacant seat. Groves protested. "This lady has engaged passage with me," he said. "You'll have to get out. If you're goin' to the Point, you can hire a car or a carriage to take ye over."

"What's the matter with *her* hiring one?" was the insolent retort. "I got here first. I'd like to see somebody put me out!"

It was done so quickly that perhaps he did not quite see it. Babson was on the running board before the man had fairly uttered the final word of that defiance, and Babson's sinewy fingers had him by the collar. A second later, the fellow struck the planking of the wharf with a crash. His hand bag flew fifteen feet beyond him.

"Get in, madam," said Babson to the startled old lady. "I'll see that this person doesn't bother you."

Having given this promise, he turned his attention again to the astonished and infuriated stranger, who was hastily getting up.

"You had better go about your business," said Babson mildly, "or you may get hurt."

On his feet, the huge man came at Babson, his face dark with rage, fists clenched, muscular arms swinging with a piston motion. It certainly was his

intention to smash Babson on the spot. Several persons in the crowd of witnesses cried out in alarm or warning.

Babson met the fellow's rush, parrying a fearful blow. Babson's fist and the point of the big man's jaw came together. The back of the man's head seemed to strike the planking before any other part of his body. He lay quite still.

Then Babson turned again and helped the trembling old lady into the carriage himself, speaking to her calmly and reassuringly. Having lifted his hat to her, he took out his handkerchief and wrapped it round his barked knuckles.

"My stars!" exclaimed Abel Groves. "You hit that big feller an awful biff! You—knocked—him—stiff!"

"I had to," stated Babson, his voice still mild and steady. "I regret that it was necessary, but I don't think he's seriously hurt. It was just a simple knock-out, I reckon."

"Simple! That what you call it?" gurgled Groves. "Maybe! But none of that simple stuff for mine! Zowie!"

The big man showed signs of recovering. In a few seconds he managed to struggle up to one elbow, in which position he stared at Babson dully, apparently uncomprehending.

"I'm sorry you forced me to hit you," Babson told him. "In a way, perhaps, it wasn't just fair of me to do it. Your style of fighting is very crude. You should learn how to handle yourself before you attempt it again. Almost everybody who knows the rudiments of scientific sparring could thump you at will."

What the fellow said in return to that caused the agitated old lady in the jitney to clap her hands over her ears and beseech Abel Groves to drive away as quickly as possible.

"It's evident," said Babson to the man, "that you're not damaged enough to be disturbed about. Your manners and your language both need correct-

ing. Think that over. It may be good for you." With which piece of advice he turned and walked away.

"Who is that buck?" asked the man who had been knocked down, sitting up and preparing to rise to his feet. "What's his name? I want to remember him."

"I don't know," answered one of the group of seemingly highly pleased villagers; "but if he was a little older I'd say he was Jim Corbett. Take it from me, mister, you'd better forget him."

CHAPTER V.

LEARNING HER SECRET.

INSTEAD of returning to the Pine Point Hotel for dinner that night, Babson remained in Spring Cove and dined at a little restaurant that was noted for its sea food. He sat on an outside rear balcony overlooking the water, from which position he could look down upon small vessels lying at the crowded wharves. It was pleasant, but lonely, and Babson pitied himself for a luckless dog. In spite of tempting things to eat, his appetite was poor, and a sort of desperate melancholia took possession of him.

"Daughter of a retired professor," he murmured to himself. "You haven't a show in the world, you poor skate!"

In the gathering twilight he started to walk back to Pine Point. The moon was peeping up in the east and throwing a red-gold shimmer across the sea when he drew near the hotel. Still some distance away, he chose a short cut, taking a path that led through a little pine grove and came out at the disused tennis courts just west of the hotel. Beneath his feet the soft, brown pine needles made a soundless carpet.

With four more steps he would have issued upon the courts when he halted abruptly. The voice of Ruth Burke had stopped him in his tracks. He could not see her, but he could hear her plead-

ing in a low tone, and he heard her words distinctly.

"Please," she was saying, "please go away, Link! What made you follow me here? I didn't think you'd do that. I tried to make you understand——"

"Oh, yes!" a man's voice cut in. "You tried to make me understand when you saw that I was serious. It was too late then. You'd started something you couldn't stop so easy. Even your old man couldn't scare me off. I ain't afraid of him, but he's afraid of me, for he knows that I know he's a murderer. I know he killed a man, and he's been hidin' up there at Groton in the woods for years. He couldn't drive me off, so he sent you away. But I saw a letter from you, and I saw the postmark on the envelope. So I'm here!"

Babson's jaws were hard set. For a moment longer, but without the least desire to eavesdrop, he hesitated. If the girl was in the slightest danger, he would step in to protect her; but if she was not in danger, he was disposed to turn about and hurry silently away. For he had unintentionally listened to something that he much preferred she did not know he had heard. A murderer—her father!

She was speaking again: "You're silly, Link! I never gave you any reason to think me more than a friend. You did me a great favor once, and naturally I was grateful. I didn't think you would misunderstand."

Not a word in denial of the accusation against her father! Then, of course, it was true!

"Oh, no!" the unseen man sneered in response. "You didn't do a thing but talk and laugh with me till everybody around Groton was talkin', too!"

"I had to talk to somebody!" she exclaimed. "And goodness knows there are few enough people around there to talk to. I didn't think——"

"No, you didn't think that other folks

would talk and laugh, too, did you? You didn't think they'd take to callin' you my girl. Well, that's what they did. They didn't dare say much to my face, but I knew what they were sayin' behind my back. I didn't care much, for I was just wild about you. You made me so. Then, when I told you, you tried to throw me down. You quit seein' me any more or giving me a chance. Then I knew folks were talkin' more than ever behind my back, and laughing at me. And when I went to your old man, he ordered me off and threatened to shoot me. But I've got him now—got him cold! And I'm goin' to have you, too! 'Tain't no use for you to try to run away from me. I'll foller you if I have to foller you round the world. I'm goin' to have you, Ruth, if I have to take you by main force."

"Stop, Link! Don't touch me! They'll hear me in the hotel if I call."

"You won't!" he declared, and the way he laughed made Babson's blood leap hotly. "You were afraid to have the folks round the hotel see me talkin' with you, and so you met me out here. You don't want them to know who you are and what your old man is. Oh, no, you won't holler, Ruth!"

"She doesn't have to," said Babson, stepping out before the couple in the shadow at the edge of the grove. "If you don't cut this stuff out and let Miss Burke alone, something is going to happen to you far more unpleasant than what happened at Spring Cove this afternoon."

As he spoke he advanced into the moonlight in order that the fellow might recognize him unmistakably. For, although he was literally tingling to give the ruffian a second lesson, he did not wish to set the hotel buzzing with the scandal that a pitched battle in such circumstances would surely stir up. So far as possible, he was anxious to protect the girl from that.

The man uttered a half-smothered

exclamation of fury, but not a sound came from Miss Burke. Nevertheless, Babson saw her shrink in a startled way, and he felt that she was struck dumb with consternation.

"I beg your pardon for butting in, Miss Burke," he said. "I happened to be coming through the path, and heard this individual threatening you. I always find pleasure in calling a bluff."

"You better mind your own business!" the man snarled at him.

"There isn't much excitement doing that," returned Babson, "and one craves excitement after a week or two around here. If Miss Burke will be good enough to leave us alone, perhaps we might stir some up."

She flitted quickly to his side and put a trembling hand on his arm. "Don't!" she whispered, in evident fear. "You don't know this man! He's a brute, a ruffian, a fighter! He——"

Babson interrupted her with a light laugh, keeping his eyes on the man all the while. "Brute and ruffian he may be, but when it comes to fighting he's a joke. We have met before."

"I—I don't understand." The girl glanced at the huge figure in the shadow. "I know his reputation. I thought he'd attack you instantly."

"I doubt if he ever tries that again, unless my back is turned. Shall I escort you to the hotel, Miss Burke?"

"No, no! But I'm afraid to leave you here—with him."

"You needn't be. It happens that I do know him. I have his measure. You can see that he's not making haste to jump at me. He won't try it at all."

But Miss Burke could not feel sure about that. "If you will walk to the corner of the hotel with me, you can leave me there," she said.

With his head turned so that he could continue to keep an eye on the man, Babson walked away with her. The fellow at the edge of the woods watched them, without stirring.

At the corner of the hotel, Ruth stopped a moment and said: "Look out for Link Snell! I don't know why he did nothing, but I tell you he is a bad man. Thank you, Mr. Babson. Good night."

When she was gone, Babson looked back toward the grove again. He could no longer perceive the black figure of Snell in the edge of the shadow.

"A bad man," he said to himself, "is quite often a coward. This one is no exception." When he entered the hotel, he went at once to his room.

He had something to think about. With him Ruth Burke's secret was safe, but not with Link Snell. It seemed indisputable that the fellow's knowledge of her father's crime gave him power over her that he would not hesitate to use to force her to yield to his demand. To protect her father, to save him from the consequences of his crime, she might be compelled to give herself into the possession of the wretch. And Babson could think of no way to save her, no way to silence Snell. Never in his life had he been so madened by his helplessness.

He did not sleep well, and he rose early. He was eager to see Ruth again, to talk with her, to offer his sympathy as delicately as possible and assure her that he was ready to do anything in his power for her. What he could do he did not know, but he felt that something must be done. He wanted to find out more about Snell. Perhaps somewhere in the fellow's past there was something hidden that, could the truth be learned, might be held over him to frighten him into silence.

Neither Ruth nor her aunt appeared at breakfast. Hesitating about making inquiries, Babson waited until almost eleven o'clock. Then he went to the clerk.

"Miss Burke and her aunt left the hotel last night," he was told.

"Left!" echoed Babson inanely. "How? Where did they go?"

"They hired an automobile to take them to Oldcastle so that they could catch the early train this morning."

"The early train—for where?" asked Babson feebly.

"Portland. They registered from New York. They left no instructions about forwarding mail, but I presume that's where they were going."

Babson turned away. He could not even express thanks for the information. "A knock-out for me!" he muttered. "What I handed Link Snell was a love tap compared to this."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY MAN.

THREE days later the semiweekly West Branch mail stage—which was no more than a battered buckboard—dropped a single passenger at Gorton. That passenger was Roger Babson, and he was fully dressed for roughing it in the Maine woods. His only baggage was a leather hand kit bound with heavy straps.

The stage driver tossed a flat mail pouch to Sim Bundy, postmaster, storekeeper, and hotel proprietor, and carelessly threw off three or four boxes and bundles for Bundy's son, a sleepy-looking boy of seventeen, to take charge of.

"That's all," he said. "The big box is for old man Burke."

"Ain't ye goin' to stop for feed?" asked Bundy.

"Nope. Road's gettin' good, and I'm more'n an hour ahead of time. C'n make Bickford's in time to get the eats there. So long, Sim." He gathered up the reins and drove off.

Babson looked Bundy's place over. It was a sizable frame building, sheathed and weather-stripped. The paintbrush had never touched it. From one of the windows peered an unkempt,

solemn woman and soiled-faced child with a half-eaten cracker in its fist. On a broken chair beside the front steps sat a thin young man in sport clothes, staring with deep interest at Babson.

The new arrival looked round the clearing. There were four more buildings to be seen, but they were mere shacks. The largest, painted a sickly green, was not more than a third the size of Bundy's place.

"Is this the hotel?" asked Babson.

"Sure," answered Bundy. "Wasn't lookin' for no guests, but I guess we can put ye up. Got another stoppin' here." He wriggled a blackened thumb toward the young man in sport clothes.

The young man rose, stepped forward, and spoke to Babson. "I'm hanged," he said, "if I don't believe you're Mysterious Jack Doyle!"

Babson frowned. "Guilty," he acknowledged; "but I'd deny it if I thought you would believe me."

The young man grabbed his hand. "My name's Spencer. I saw you fight Sandy Maguire and spoil his hopes of becoming a champ. I'm up here for my health. Doing a little fishing over on Caribou Pond. Foolish doctor said my right lung was on the blink, and sent me up here. But, say, what happened to you? Been reading in the papers how you just evaporated, melted away, disappeared after that scrap. And you were in line to get at Battling Gibson and become champ yourself. I'll bet my pile on you any day you meet Gibson. He can stand punishment, and he's got a punch, but you can stand punishment and you've got *everything*! Suppose that holler your manager's been making about not knowing what has become of you is all guff. You're just knocking around and taking a rest before you get Gibson, eh? That's it—what?"

"Nothing like it," returned Babson quietly. "I'm done. I've quit the game."

"Quit!" Spencer exclaimed, in horror. "You can't quit! You don't look like a quitter."

"I'd never have been a beginner if hard luck hadn't driven me to it. Boxing is the only thing I learned thoroughly while I was at college, but I didn't learn it with the remotest idea of ever becoming a prize fighter, a pug. Hardly! However, lack of other qualifications made me fail at everything else I attempted. I fought the first time for ten dollars because I simply had to have the ten. It proved to be the easiest ten I'd ever made. Tex Clifton saw me win that ten, and he came to me with a proposition. I signed up with him. He's managed me for two years, and we've both made money. But he knew I never intended to stick at the game.

"I didn't deceive Clifton," he went on, "but I did deceive the public, for my name's Babson, not Doyle. But even under a fictitious name I have no desire to become a champion. To avoid that I had either to meet Maguire again and be whipped by him or quit. I quit. I've avoided all the friends I had before I took up fighting; I didn't permit myself to make any while I was at that. So they called me Mysterious Jack. My former friends weren't proud enough of me to brag about their friendship, those who happened to find out what I'd done. Therefore I have something to be thankful for."

"But as a champ you might pull down more coin in one fight than you made in the two years you were at it."

"I should worry!" said Babson. "I'm going in. I want to see my room and wash up."

CHAPTER VII.

OF INTEREST TO THE GUEST.

HAVING sorted the mail, Bundy was sitting on the front steps, smoking a black corncob and talking with Spencer, when Babson came down from his room. The proprietor of the place

looked his new guest over with great interest, which seemed to indicate that Spencer had been telling him something.

"I'll bring out another chair for ye, mister," he said, rising hastily. "It'll be near an hour before dinner is ready. That is, unless you're in a hurry. If you be——"

"Not at all," Babson assured him. "And I prefer to sit on the steps. Groton appears to be a rather peaceful place; not much going on."

"Not at this season of the year," agreed Bundy, lowering himself back to the top step beside the new arrival. "You see, it's sort of between hay and grass now. In the spring and fall it's dif'rent. In the spring the fishin' sports come in and the choppers go out; in the fall we get the huntin' sports and the choppers goin' in. There's quite a lot stirrin' round here them times, though I don't imagine it's quite as lively as New York, where you come from." He finished with a slow grin, and gave a pull at his gurgling pipe.

"It's a good place to rest," said Spencer. "Anyhow, it was before that gang over in the green house got a supply of fire water. They kept me awake, whooping it up, all last night, but they're quiet enough to-day. Sleeping it off, I suppose."

"That's Jo Lubec's place," explained Bundy. "Jo's been arrested twice for sellin' booze, and the officers come after him ag'in this spring, but he got out a couple of jumps ahead of them. Been back 'most three weeks now, and layin' low. Jo's a bad aig. Carries a knife and is quick to use it in a fight. He's sore on me now; thinks I informed on him. I don't sell no liquor here, and I'm a peaceful man; but I know enough not to make no talk about Lubec. I hope him and his crowd don't take a notion to clean out my place." There was more than mild anxiety in the way he uttered those final words.

"Where they all came from so suddenly and where they're stowed away in that little shack is what gets me," said Spencer. "There must be a dozen of them."

"That crew can smell booze ten miles away," averred Bundy. "Link Snell fetched in a supply when he come back yisterday, and they gathered like flies round a molasses barrel."

"Link Snell?" queried Babson. "Who is he?"

"He's a good person to keep away from when he goes on a toot," answered Bundy. "He owns some sportin' camps over on Beaver Pond, but he hangs round here a good deal 'tween seasons, specially sence he got smit on old man Burke's girl. There's some girl! A peach! She come back, too, day before yisterday. Buckboarded it all the way from Spruce Junction, along with her aunt."

If either the speaker or Spencer had been looking at Babson then, they would have seen a gleam of triumph flash into his eyes.

"She's li'ble to ride down here for mail this afternoon," Bundy went on. "When she's home she almost alwus comes down on mail days. There ain't no city girls got nothin' on her. But then she's been away to school a good deal and mixed a lot with classy folks. Her old man's bound she shall be a real lady, I guess."

"You interest me," said Babson lightly.

"She'll interest ye when you see her. That's what ails Link; he got too interested. He'd oughter known he didn't have a chance with the likes of her. I cal'late it was him botherin' her so much that drove her away after she come home from school this spring. He must 'a' knowed she was back ag'in, for he showed up here just a day behind her. If he wakes up from his spree of last night, he'll be watchin' for her to come for the mail later on."

"I got a chance to give her the once over," remarked Spencer. "Bundy's got her right; she's a peach."

"My interest grows by leaps and bounds," Babson admitted. "What about her father? What does he do up here in this country?"

"He's a queer old rooster," said Bundy. "Sort of a hermit, in a way. Nobody knows much about him, though a man did come here last year that seemed to know him. Burke had a con-flab with the man, and after that the man wouldn't say much of anything about him. Burke come in five year ago, nobody knows where from. He bought the old horse farm of the Harmon & Whiting Lumber Company, over on Mitchell Mountain. There was a good set of buildin's, but the company warn't usin' the farm no more, and Burke must 'a' got it dirt cheap."

"How far is it to Burke's farm?"

"About three mile."

"It doesn't appear to me that farming in such a place can offer many inducements to an outsider. I don't see how it can be made very profitable."

"Now, that's one of the odd things; I don't cal'late Burke cares whether it's profitable or not. He don't try to ship nothing out, and what he sells he sells to them that's willin' to come after it. He had a heap of furniture and things hauled in, includin' a piano, and he's fixed the buildings up fine and painted them. He just seems to want to live there comfortable by himself. It must be lonesome when the girl's away, for her mother's dead. Burke's sister is his housekeeper. Once, when Link Snell was drinkin', he pretended that he knew somethin' about Burke, but I guess it was John Barleycorn talkin'. If Link does know anything of that sort, he's the only one round here."

That was all Babson could learn of particular interest to him, although he continued to talk with Bundy and Spencer until Bundy's lazy-looking son

loafed out to the door and informed them that dinner was ready. They went in through the general store and post office to the dining room at the rear, where they sat down at an oil-cloth-covered table and ate something the proprietor called veal, although it tasted very much like venison to Babson. Having done the cooking, Mrs. Bundy waited on the table.

Babson's appetite was excellent, and he was not at all finical, therefore he enjoyed it thoroughly. Many a time he had eaten worse food in worse places.

Before they had finished, some one was heard to come into the store. Bundy left the table and went out, closing the door behind him. The muffled sound of men's voices came through the partition.

A few minutes later, Babson and Spencer followed Bundy. In the open front doorway a slender, wiry, dark-faced man stood leaning a shoulder against the jamb. Behind his counter, Bundy was replacing a half-emptied box of cigars in the small, fly-specked show case. In front of the show case a big man was just applying a lighted match to the cigar he had bought. Babson walked into this man's range of vision, and the man dropped the match.

"Hello, Snell!" said Babson.

"Tophet's bells!" exclaimed Link Snell. "How'd you come here?"

CHAPTER VIII.

LIKE HUNGRY WOLVES.

BABSON smiled. "Having inadvertently overheard you mention a place by the name of Groton," he returned, "I decided to come up here and look it over."

Snell bit through the cigar in his teeth. His eyes were bloodshot. A wolfish sneer curled one corner of his mouth upward.

"You did, hey?" he barked. "Well,

you came at a good time. I'm glad to see ye! And I got some friends that'll welcome ye. Lubec, call the boys!"

The dark man in the doorway thrust his fingers into his mouth and whistled shrilly.

"The lid's off the pot!" spluttered Bundy, in alarm. "Now there'll be a mess!"

Spencer grabbed Babson's elbow. "That's a signal for the gang!" he exclaimed nervously. "What are you going to do? You can't——"

"He can't do anything!" shouted Link Snell. "I've got him where I want him. I know why he came here. He came up here after Ruth Burke. What he'll get is something he didn't come after."

Then, perhaps with a desire to harrow Babson's feelings, he betrayed his own evil design. "But I'll have her! She'll find out she can't make a fool of me! I got the boys to back me up, and I'll have her if I have to go to old Burke's place and take her! After I've beat the head off this meddlin' old——"

Through the open door Babson caught a glimpse of men coming toward Bundy's place at a run. It was time for action. Snell and Lubec must be thrown out instantly, and the door closed. Then, if Bundy had the courage to furnish him with a gun, he would try to stand the gang off. He made a leap for Snell.

But Spencer, clutching his arm again, spoiled it. It was just enough to prevent Babson from reaching Link Snell without swerving him in his pantherish spring. It yanked him a bit to one side as he jumped. Snell was able to dodge. Shouting for the men outside to hurry, Jo Lubec lunged forward to help Snell. The others came pouring in.

Babson was caught. They surrounded him like a pack of wolves. He

met the attack with astonishing coolness, his fists cracking against their heads and knocking them right and left. Clutching hands tore his coat from his back. Again and again those hands grasped him, but could not seem to hold him. His woolen shirt and his light undershirt were torn to shreds. In less than a minute his body was practically naked to the waist.

Bundy crouched behind his counter, fully believing it would mean his ruin if he attempted to interfere in behalf of his guest. Spencer did try to help Babson, but a heavy boot, planted in his stomach, sent him thudding into a corner.

In the midst of those ruffians, Babson fought on alone. His bleeding fists smashed the snarling faces that could be reached. Beneath the pinky-white skin his splendid muscles rippled and played. He was battered by blows he did not seem to feel at all. His teeth were set, his nostrils dilated, his eyes filled with a battle light.

Gripping a knife, a hand struck at him. He leaped back a step, and the knife barely scored his ribs. In a flash he had Jo Lubec by the wrist. There was a snapping twist, a scream from Lubec. The knife quivered with its point in the floor. Lubec clung, ghastly white and roaring with pain, to a broken arm.

Round and round the room the battle raged. The barrel stove was knocked over, and lengths of piping, discharging soot, came clattering down from wire supports upon the heads of the men. Sent staggering back by a blow, a ruffian crashed against the counter and upset the shattered show case and its contents upon the cowering Bundy.

Time after time Babson tried to get at Link Snell, who was urging the brutes on; but Snell managed to keep out of reach. Men who were down were trampled on. Hands grabbed at Babson's feet, but he kicked himself

free and continued to keep his pins beneath him.

Then he heard a cry—a woman's cry. He caught a glimpse of Ruth Burke on the top step outside the open door. He saw a rawboned man, bewhiskered, shaggy-haired, and grizzled, push past her and jump into the room. The man shouted: "Keep at 'em, son! Tom Burke is with ye!"

"It's time somebody was!" panted Babson.

He was beginning to feel a bit groggy, for it had been more than human flesh and blood could stand up under indefinitely. In a few minutes more they would have got him. But now, seeing the bewhiskered Burke sail into the ruffians like a cyclone, delivering smashing, sledge-hammer blows, he revived.

Snell, surprised, had turned his head to look at the newcomer. Babson saw his chance. He hammered a smaller man aside and reached Snell.

"One more in the same old place!" he cried, and struck Snell on the jaw with every particle of power he could put into the blow. Snell went down.

At the same instant, something like a load of dynamite seemed to explode in the top of Babson's head. His legs buckled beneath him, and he sank in a senseless heap upon the floor.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHITHER THOU GOEST."

EVEN before his eyes fluttered open again, Babson felt a cool, moist hand on his forehead and heard Ruth's voice calling his name. He lifted his lids, looked up into her face, and forced a weak smile. Immediately she became mildly hysterical.

"I'm all right," Babson told her reassuringly.

He was still lying on the floor. Around him was the débris of Bundy's wrecked store, but the ruffians were

gone. Sitting on the floor, Ruth was holding his head in her lap while she bathed his face and head in water from a tin washbasin beside her.

Bundy, Spencer, and the bewhiskered, rawboned man who had come to Babson's aid were looking on. The last mentioned spoke:

"You bet you're all right, son! If one of them white-livered curs hadn't sneaked up behind you and belted ye over the nut with a broken chair, you'd 'a' been on your pins at the finish."

"The finish!" said Babson. "What was the finish?"

"It didn't last long after you busted Link Snell's jaw. You broke it with that little tap. I reckon they got him laid out in Jo Lubec's joint. With him out of the way, I was able to finish the job you'd begun so well. This here young man tells me you're a regular fighter, and known by the name of Jack Doyle."

"That's right," admitted Babson, looking at Ruth. "Now you know what to think of me."

"Yes," she whispered, a wonderful light in her blue eyes. "I know what to think of you now."

He sat up, and the others helped him to his feet. "I wish somebody would give me something to cover me," he said.

Bundy flung a blanket over his shoulders.

"What was that about breaking Snell's jaw?" he asked. "Did I do that?"

"You did, son," affirmed the man who had helped him. "Don't feel bad about it. I killed a man once with a blow. I'm Big Tom Burke. Perhaps you've heard of me."

Babson looked at him in astonishment. "Big Tom Burke, the old-timer, the champion?" he cried.

"That's me. I never stepped into the ring again after I finished Tugboat Kelley. I did teach boxing for a while,

but I gave that up and got as far away from the business as I could."

"You see," whispered Ruth pleadingly, "I told you the truth when I said my father was a retired professor. They called him professor when he taught boxing."

Babson grasped Big Tom Burke's hand. "I'm proud to know you," he declared. "It's a sure thing that you can still use your fists efficiently. As soon as I can wash up, pull myself together, and get some clothes, I'd like to have a talk with you."

"Ruth and I rode down for the mail," said Burke. "We're going right back. You better come with us, and make us a visit at my farm. That gang that tried to do ye is thrashed to a frazzle now and won't lift a hand to bother us. But if ye stay here alone mebbe you'll have more trouble."

Babson looked at Ruth. She was silent. "Let me get cleaned up and find some clothes," he said, starting away. "Then I'll tell you what I'll do!"

The girl ran after him and grasped his arm with both her hands. "I know you think I deceived you," she said, in a low tone. "I didn't tell you about my father. It has preyed on his mind—killing that man, though it was an accident. For that reason, and for my sake as well, he has tried in recent years to get away where nobody would recognize him, where nobody would ever know that he had been a prize fighter. And I thought you—you wouldn't—think much of me—if you knew I was the daughter of a prize fighter."

"And I thought you knew I had been one, and rather despised me for it," he returned. "We were both deceiving ourselves, it seems."

"And you'll accept father's invitation? You'll come to the farm for a visit? I want you to."

"Whither thou goest," said Babson, "depend upon it, I'll follow."



On the Wings of a Joke. ^{By} Walter Dahmsen



WHEN the students of Litchfield College heard the news they gave their verdict: "Why, it's the biggest joke of the season—if there's an atom of truth in the rumor." The direct result of its circulation was the appearance of a group of "Beef" Barron's closest friends in the big athlete's room.

Struggling to suppress a peal of merriment, Steve Nelson opened: "How about this stuff, Beef—your going in for the dashes? A misstatement, eh?" Determined to derive the greatest possible amusement from the situation, he continued: "As a football player, Beef, you're the best half back that ever masticated the mud on Litchfield's gridiron. But I rather doubt whether you'd ever get a chance with speed kings like Powell and Briswell piloting their leg power down the paths. However, you could heave the shot——"

"And ruin my arm for pitching!" Beef vetoed with a solemnity that suggested the possibility of truth underlying the wild report.

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Steve's accomplices joined in the guffaw of mirth that followed. "You're the only chap in college with implicit faith in your pitch——" He broke off abruptly. Turning a cold shower on another's aspirations as a means of showing how futile of attainment he deemed them was a violation of Nelson's code. "Er—I'm not meaning to discourage you, old man," he said, making an attempt to pass off the situation humorously. "Sprinters are generally constructed on the lines of least resistance, and it's plain to anybody with a vision of two rods, Beef, that you belong in the heavyweight division. And who'd believe us when we said you were our greatest back-field star if you joined the human skeletons?"

"Say, your joke, if that's your idea of one, makes me all the more determined to make good," growled Beef. "So can the talk."

Thus it came about that news of Beef's track resolve—incredible and far-fetched as it at first seemed—gained circulation. Had he signified

his intention to heave the shot it is probable that no more than the usual small crowd would have watched the generally formal practice work. As it was, a large crowd edged the track to witness his début.

Foremost among those skeptical of the seriousness of Beef's intentions was Coach Yoder, who regarded the whole affair in the light of a farce. The crowd decided it was to be robbed of its fun when the perambulations of a husky figure—which seemed twice as large in scant track togs as in moleskins—and a full-lunged shout of "Mercury-Adonis consolidated—gangway," advertised the aspirant's approach.

"Well, coach, you see I'm all here," the newcomer greeted affably. "What's the first trick in a sprinter's bag?"

For a moment Yoder's facile utterance failed him. Having exercised every art in his repertoire of dissuasion in vain effort to divert Beef from running, even to the frank statement that he courted certain failure thereby, he had played the strongest card in his hand. If brutal frankness could not smother his misdirected track ambitions, why expect logic to prevail? Was the same stubborn sense of loyalty that had bade the easy-going Barron support the football team directing him to make himself ludicrous on the cinder path?

Yoder's sense of humor rescued him from the speechlessness incident to Beef's open disregard for his counsel. "Why," he said, "I usually have sprinters run a slow, six-minute mile the first couple of days out as a limbering-up process. Harley's going four laps. You can let him pace you. Hurry up, fall in!"

The physical contrast between the combatants moved the crowd to spasms of laughter. The miler, abnormally long-legged, and springy as the most pliable rubber, ran with an ease that made the task look easy.

The first quarter mile brought a flush to Beef's face; the second laved his brow with a light sweat. Onlookers dismissed predictions as to when he would drop out as he embarked laboriously upon his third lap.

"He's going to stick it out and pass poor Harley at the tape," yelled the wit who had noted Beef's semblance to an Olympian consolidation; Harley being at that moment a half lap in the lead.

And as he did conclude the mile, puffing like a steam tractor, his glance at Coach Yoder contained a challenge, to which that worthy bowed, struck by the realization that any further effort to divert Beef's track ambitions would be as effective as bidding a famished horse disdain a bag of oats.

A week's training dissolved into the past before any noticeable shrinkage occurred in Beef's anatomy or in the crowd that daily thronged the field to jeer at him. Yoder, admiring his plucky desire to serve his college in a new capacity, despite the joshing send-off accorded him, withdrew his opposition. As for Barron, he attacked his new work as he never had attacked a task before.

Jeers turns to wonder as his rapid advance in form and speed became apparent. But still his name was withheld from the list of entrants in the early dual meets.

"It's this way," explained Yoder. "We're allowed two runners in each event. Naturally we want the two fastest represented. We've been slow rounding into form, and need the strongest possible combination available. Dividing your attention between pitching for the scrubs and track work hasn't benefited your running any. I'm really surprised at the form you've shown, but——"

It was the "but"—that caused disappointment to grip the sanguine giant for

the first time. "He thinks I'm a piker," he told himself. "Thinks I can't win a point in the State Meet and am not worth bothering with." The thought brought a determined look into his face, but failed to eradicate his brooding air entirely.

II.

FROM the start of the State Meet tense worry clouded the faces of the men who directed the destinies of Litchfield; signs which, despite all attempts at concealment, persisted in communicating themselves to the student body. All they knew was that Briswell, the team's most consistent point winner and greatest star, together with Powell, his closest rival and captain of the squad, had not competed in the hundred-yard dash. But that was ample provocation for the entertainment of grave fears and mild consternation.

That Briswell and Powell had taken an earlier train than that which the team went by in order to stop over with a relative of Briswell's at a town along the route was the basis of the story that went the rounds; but whether it was based on sound foundation or shallow rumor could not be ascertained. Barron sought Galbraith, track manager, for details.

"It's true, all right," he admitted. "The town's ninety miles away. It might as well be in Siberia. If they don't show up it means our finish, and we'll be scorched on both sides," he prophesied glumly.

"Maybe they'll make a later train," put in Coach Yoder, slow to despond. "I'm to blame for letting them out of my sight. Fortunately the two-twenty is the last event on the program, and maybe——"

"There's not a ghost of a show; not a doubt as to how we'll come out," cut in Galbraith despairingly.

Assistant Manager Watson, bearing a telegram, interrupted the contest of gloom and hopefulness at this stage. His dismal mien was not a hopeful omen, and it happened he had good reason for drawing a long face. The message told the story succinctly:

T. GALBRAITH, *State Field*.

Runaway freight off track. Impossible arrive in time for meet. BRISWELL.

It meant only one thing: Coldale would add another scalp to her already overheavy belt; it also meant that Litchfield's confident forecasts of victory this year would necessitate her swallowing some very unsavory pastry in the form of humble pie.

"Coldale's sure of two places in the two-twenty, possibly a clean sweep." The coach unburdened his now despairing thoughts to the surrounding atmosphere.

"Not a clean sweep," said a husky voice that made Yoder turn. Beef's usually beaming face was serious; to have met the present situation with banter would have bordered upon the irreverent. "I've kept in training, sir," the big fellow went on in pleading earnestness. "You haven't timed me lately. I've picked up speed. I'm sure I can win a place."

"Place! What good's that?" snapped Yoder. "We've got to win. Understand that! The meet will be close. The last event, the two-twenty, will decide it, I think. We'll win the mile, the hurdles, the high jump," he spoke with the solemn conviction of one who had given his team's chances careful analysis. Then his voice assumed a tone of regret: "Well, you deserve a chance, anyhow, especially as it can do no harm. You've worked hard. Say, Galbraith," he turned to the depressed manager, "send notification to the rules committee, if you can reach them, that we wish to make a substitution—two substitutions, make it, will you?"

III.

THE coach's predictions were realized with uncanny accuracy. Coldale and Litchfield seesawed for point advantage, keeping their respective adherents keyed up to fever pitch. It might have been a struggle between these two ancient foes so far as other colleges were concerned. Only a few scattered points fell to the credit of other institutions.

Just before the first call for the twenty a self-important youth sporting Coldale colors approached Yoder. "Say," he opened familiarly, "I'm Hirsh, Coldale track manager. Why didn't Briswell and Powell compete? Saving them for the two-twenty, eh?"

He propounded the query with a clever calculation that made Yoder eye his pert figure disapprovingly. He had never liked Hirsh; there was something furtively objectionable about him.

"Why are we honored with your interest in our affairs, Mr. Hirsh?" Yoder asked. "The withdrawal of our men has certainly helped you, else we'd have this meet sewed up by now."

Hirsh's lips curled; he gave forth derisive response. "I just wanted you to get a square deal, and see what you had up your sleeve. I see plainly. Didn't want to see your incompetents snowed under. We've each got thirty-six points. Coldale will sweep the two-twenty and make it forty-four—without Powell and Briswell," he added exultantly.

Within Beef, a spectator to this side play, welled an overpowering anger toward this youthful cynic for his insulting demeanor toward a man of twice his years. However, other events arose to demand his attention.

The stands grew silent as the two-twenty was announced. One heat, composed of six runners, made up the event. In a despairing effort to make a showing, Yoder had entered Jed Mor-

rison, despite his exhaustion after successful competition in hurdles and high jump. Yoder encouraged Morrison, but gave no similar exhortation to Barron, probably deeming him beneath consideration as a prospective point winner. Yet a sweeping cheer from the Litchfield section, followed by the calling of his name, told the football star he was not forgotten.

At the pistol's bark six runners sped off the mark to a perfect start. For fifty yards they kept well abreast. In the next fifty Morrison fell back; he seemed to feel the despair of hopeless effort. Next came Beef, closely pressing two entrants from obscure colleges.

The ex-football star was keeping up with the field in a manner that astonished spectators, who had anticipated that his showing would be something of a joke. He could not gain on his Coldale rivals, however, and Litchfield's hopes sank. Conceding the meet to Coldale in advance, they relapsed into depression, their hope growing fainter as the race advanced.

But Beef had not relinquished all hope yet. He knew one thing to be in his favor: the Coldale runners had done a lot of running to-day. In pursuance of a previously conceived plan, he relaxed his pace and allowed the closely matched Coldale pair to gain another yard. Then came the final stretch—the crucial test. He deemed it good policy to let the Coldale runners keep their confidence of uncontested victory.

Suddenly Beef put every ounce of conserved strength into a supreme final spurt. Somehow the crowd sensed the courage of his attempt. A great shout swelled from many throats. It seemed to give Beef an added impetus, a superhuman effort of which he had not thought himself capable.

The Coldale runners looked startled. One half turned his head, and, as he committed this blunder, Beef shot past

him. Ten yards to go and only Winton ahead of him:

It was not a dead heat. The judges were agreed on that point. But to the yelling crowd no perceptible edge seemed possessed by either runner. The margin was not wide—not over six inches. But that was sufficient to give Litchfield the meet and the supporters of her colors occasion to cast off their dignity and indulge in vociferous celebration.

IV.

WHEN Beef received private congratulations from his cronies that evening, Steve Nelson threw surprise into the gathering by asking: "You say the failure of Powell and Briswell to put in an appearance gave you the chance to make a hero of yourself?"

"Yes, gave me a chance to run." Beef modestly edited the statement. "They were held up by a derailed train at Hanford, after obtaining the coach's permission to stop off there. I saw the telegram Galbraith received."

"Beef," said Nelson, "I don't want to dispute an honest fellow's solemn judgment, but that's all rot. There's something more to it than that. I saw Powell and Briswell, as plainly as I see you now, seated together in the Coldale stands. They acted as if they didn't feel particularly anxious to be recognized by the crowd. There can be no doubt. I'm sure it was they."

"But, Steve, it's impossible that they——"

In the surprise of this mysterious development and what lay behind it, the entrance of a man through the open door, after pausing to catch these last words, escaped notice until the newcomer interrupted their talk. "I overheard your words, and Nelson is right, fellows." The speaker was Coach Yoder, and his words fell like a thunderbolt. "Powell and Briswell were not delayed, and we were aware of it

all the time. It was a frame-up pure and simple, and it worked out just as planned, if results are to be considered."

Surprise having captivated his listeners beyond the power of utterance, the coach continued: "We got confirmation, a day before the meet, of Powell's and Briswell's disqualification for running under athletic club colors during Easter holidays. It was the work of Coldale, always seeking a chance to take advantage of technical loopholes. Our failure to inform you of this beforehand was the result of a secret council. Never having garnered a point in a track meet, we figured you might fret over the responsibility, with the result that you would be unable to do yourself justice. However, we figured, if the necessity of winning for the college were suddenly put up to you, you'd come through, as you always did in football; remembering, of course, that Coldale's sprinters had done enough running in previous competition to lose their fine edge. If they'd had a chance to gauge your caliber in the hundred, they might have taken special pains to beat you in the two-twenty and thus carried off the meet.

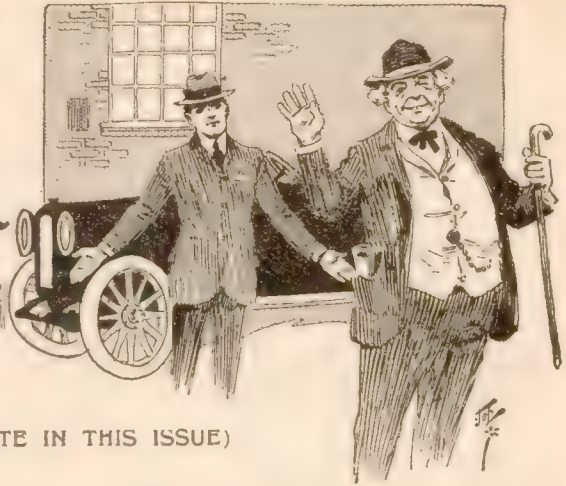
"Therefore," the coach summed up, "I cautioned Powell and Briswell to make themselves invisible. We fixed up that story of the derailment and the telegram and all that, arranging to spring it at the right moment; and we plotted to have you overhear our lamentations."

Instead of growing angry at this confession of the deception practiced upon him, Beef looked gratified. "I thought there was something queer about it all. If I'd known I had to win—if you'd given me as much as a word of encouragement—or if I hadn't been pretty sore over the idea of the unfair deal I thought I'd received, I'd never have won. I had only one race in me at that speed."

A Romance of Second-Hand Automobiles—

Never in His Life—

By Andrew Soutar



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

ONE-CYLINDER VIEWS.

SECONDHAND motor cars, like secondhand books, are wonderfully sociable; they love to huddle together in old age. There is a colony of them, and that colony is known to all motorists as the Row. Romance in secondhand motor cars? There is little else, but it is the men who handle them that this chronicle concerns. And in all the Row there was no more striking personality than Silas Pickleberry. That was not his name, but it will serve. In the Row he was known as "Old Plug," while his son, who was in partnership with him, was never spoken of by any other term than "Mr. John."

John's modern ideas came near to breaking the old man's heart. "All that you have I gave you," he said one day.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, father," John replied.

"I'll see that you don't. When I quarrel it's with a man; boys ought to be spanked."

"There's no reason why we should split," remarked John.

"Every reason in the world, since you've got it into your head that you know more about the business than your father. You! I was handling one-cylinder cars and making a pile years before you poked your nose into the world. I should have sent you to a fool college, then shoved you into a cycle shop to learn your trade."

"You'd have stopped at one-cylinders, if I hadn't pushed you on," John said quietly.

"Stopped at 'em! Dodgast it! If you had your way, you'd have the walls of a garage draped with silk; you'd fit your men out with blue-and-yaller uniforms; you'd stock your shop with purple-upholstered, saloon-bodied, parlor fandangles, and—and be in the bankruptcy court within a month."

"As an engineer——"

"Dodgast it again! You've no right to be an engineer in the secondhand trade. Engineers waste their time taking down the engine of a seven-year-old car to cure it of a 'knock' in the cylinders."

"While you——"

"Sell it and let the other man do the mending." The red waistcoat bulged out; two thumbs were poked

under armpits. There was a twinkle in the old man's eyes as he said musingly: "John, you're a clever lad; come, now, what's a knock?"

John took him seriously. "Something you'll find in every car that you handle," he said; "a cylinder choked with carbon, so that there's neither pull nor punch in your engine when you're trying to climb a hill."

"He, he!" laughed the old man. "But you've got a lot to learn, John. A knock in an engine is a noise that the seller never hears when he's giving a trial run, and won't believe in when the buyer comes back the next day to whine."

"Exactly. That's one of the reasons why you and I have to part company. Honesty is much more attractive to me than mere profit."

Old Plug almost died of suffocation in that minute. His round, clean-shaven face became as red as the vest he was never without; his big, protruding eyes were all pupil with no iris. "Honesty!" he gasped. "Go into the Row and ask any of the boys what they think of Old Plug. They've known me for fifteen years. They know me to be a this year's model all the time—an eight-cylinder, up-to-date, model, electric light, and self-starter. They know me——"

"Maybe they know you better than you know yourself, dad," said John quietly.

That was the end of the partnership. Old Plug's helpmeet, Hannah, fought hard for her son, and, in consequence, seriously jeopardized the love the old man bore her. In vain she pleaded that youth must have its turn—that John must learn by experience, that he had been brought up in an atmosphere very different from that in which his father had moved as a young man.

The old man would not relent. John was a snob; he had been coddled and pampered; he was ashamed of his par-

entage, ashamed of the old red waistcoat that for years and years had been more effective than any signboard; he was ashamed of the secondhand car business—he wanted to handle new goods. Probably there was a woman at the back of it all.

CHAPTER II.

IN GOOD CONDITION.

JOHN took a shop on the other side of the Row, and spent his savings in office fittings that were smarter than any others in the business. He took over the agency of a new car, putting down a deposit of about a thousand dollars.

In the beginning he could not afford to step right out of the secondhand trade, and although he hung out a signboard that made it clear to the men in the Row that his business had no connection with that of Mr. Silas Pickleberry, it was understood between them that they would not allow personal animosity to interfere with business; that if John could put through a deal for his father, he would do so, and if the old man had anything to recommend which might show John a small profit, he would not hesitate to do so. Old Plug's vanity had been seriously wounded by what he called the ingratitude of the serpent's tooth, and during the first week of the new arrangement he spent so much time in warning his friends against the thanklessness of children that at least half a dozen good deals went begging.

Those who tried to mollify him by enumerating the good points in Mr. John came in for violent vituperation; those who sought to ingratiate themselves with Old Plug by contemning John for his lack of filial piety were told to clear out of the shop before they had their heads knocked off with a monkey wrench.

There was an hour, on the seventh

or eighth day, when a single word might have led to the reuniting of father and son. Three times Old Plug reached the middle of the street on his way to his son's office; three times did the red waistcoat reverse and return. On the ninth day there was a business tragedy that left the old man palpitating with anger.

At ten o'clock in the morning a private owner drove up in a three-year-old four-passenger car which Old Plug could see from his office at the far end of the display room. "I'm pressed for ready money," said the stranger, presenting his card to Old Plug. "I have a four-passenger Hummer at the door—late 1914 model, good condition. I gave eighteen hundred and seventy-five for it. Does it interest you?"

"Three hundred and seventy-five dollars," said the old man, without looking up, but glancing at the card on his desk.

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the stranger.

"I know it is," said Old Plug, "but it's my business to buy rubbish and try to sell it at a profit."

"I'll try somebody else," said the stranger. "Thank you for your courtesy."

"What year did you say it was?"

"Late 1914."

"He, he!" laughed Old Plug, reaching for his pipe. "It was a sad model that year. What did I say—three seventy-five? Dodgast it! I've written the check out, too. Well, there you are; take it or leave it."

"But you haven't seen the car yet," said the stranger.

"No," said Old Plug; "I'm not feeling well this morning, and a shock of that sort would do me no good. I know I'm a fool, but I'll take a chance."

The stranger looked at the check, and he could not resist it. He gave a receipt, wished Old Plug good morning, and went through the room to the street. Twice he walked around the

old car, glanced back at the display room as if he regretted the deal, then hurried away.

Old Plug gave him ten minutes, then picked up the telephone and got into communication with a dealer at the other end of the Row. "That you, Skidden?" he asked. "This is Si Pickleberry. Does an early 1915 Hummer interest you? In perfect running condition, engines just been overhauled, paint as good as new. One of the most flexible things I've ever had through my hands. Price six hundred and seventy-five, and I wouldn't part with it if I wasn't full up with stock. You do like it? Right! Then send along your check and your man. It's at the door now."

The car was driven away half an hour later, and as Old Plug indorsed the check and handed it to his stenographer to take to the bank he had another try at the pipe that always needed lighting, and his eyes twinkled merrily as he said: "Ah, John! You may be a good engineer, but you don't know a lot about cars."

The old man put through three or four deals that morning, and after lunch he had a private inquiry for a good two-seated car, price no particular object. He liked the look of this man, who was gentlemanly and obviously an amateur.

Old Plug regarded him intently a while; then he said: "What do you mean by price being no object? Would you go to one thousand for a good secondhand four-passenger?"

"Have you got such a thing?" the stranger asked.

"Not in my pocket," said Old Plug, "but if you're ready to put down your check, you shall have your car, and you can drive it away."

The stranger paid a deposit of twenty-five dollars and went downtown, promising to return at five o'clock in the afternoon. Old Plug called up

every dealer of his acquaintance to inquire if they had a four-passenger car for sale, and, finding that they had not, he stamped on his personal pride and appealed to John. The voice that came over the wire betrayed delight, if not a note of victory. He would do his best; he fancied that he knew where he could get one.

"Will you leave it to me?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy," said Old Plug doubtfully. "Only don't go too high, because I don't think this gentleman will pay more than a thousand."

Within an hour John called up to say that he had bought the very car that his father was looking for, and paid eight hundred and seventy-five dollars for it, and as an engineer he was satisfied that it was cheap at the price. "You ought to make a hundred and twenty-five on this," he said.

"All right," said Old Plug. "I'll split it with you. When's it coming? My man will be here in half an hour."

"It will be at your door within the next ten minutes," said John.

In ten minutes it came. It was the late 1914 Hummer.

CHAPTER III.

WITH PURPLE CURTAINS.

WHEN Old Plug realized how he had been done he called Heaven to witness that his son was the hardest-hearted son that had ever broken a parent's faith. But he kept back the full torrent of wrath until he had a chance of seeing if he could square things by getting a thousand from the stranger for the car. As the stranger did not return, and as his check for twenty-five dollars was marked "No funds" by the bank and returned, Old Plug was driven to the conclusion that he had been made the victim of his son's spite.

He telephoned to him. "You sold me a flivver, but you'll rue it. I'm go-

ing to keep this Hummer in my garage at home, so that every time your mother and I look at it we shall remember all we've done for you, and all you've done for us!"

John, however, was innocent. When he heard the true story of the Hummer that returned he was ready to borrow money in order to liquidate the debt, but Old Plug would not hear of it. For many weeks it was dangerous to mention Mr. John in the office of the old man.

Meanwhile Mr. John took over the agency of the Juggernaut car. He had spent so much money on office embellishment that he had little left with which to advertise, and since he had to buy a car from the firm in order to use it as a demonstration car, he was pretty short-pursed within a month.

But he liked the car. He believed it to be a thoroughly good-selling proposition, if only the public could be persuaded to that end. Old Plug did not go near him, but he learned a lot from the mother, who had paid many a surreptitious visit to her son to find out if he were in need of anything.

There came a night when she told Old Plug the truth concerning the Juggernaut car. "Si," she said, "it would break your heart to see the boy's face. And he's put all his money into this thing. He hasn't got a single order yet."

"What's the basis he's working on?" asked the old man.

"Twenty-five per cent on each car that he sells," she said.

"And the price of this—this fancy-named thing?"

"Seventeen hundred and fifty dollars.

"Dodgast it!" exclaimed the old man. "I never gave that for a car in my life. Does he think it's as easy to sell new cars as it is to sell nuts in the zoo?"

"He has a brave face, Si."

"It's about all he has got," said the old man.

"And he tells me that the landlord's pressing for the rent of the premises."

"If he knew as much as I do," said Old Plug, "he'd slip the sheriff in."

"Si, how can you talk like that about your own flesh and blood?"

"Woman," said the old man, pointing at her with the stem of his pipe, "I've only got to take a run down the garden to the garage and look at the Hummer car to feel as bloodthirsty as Cain. Dodgast it, woman, they've been laughing at me in the Row ever since, and they'll go on laughing for years after I'm dead."

The old woman was rubbing her lips with the lace edge of a black apron. "My heart fair bleeds for him, Si. If you'd heard the way he said, 'How's the dad?'—oh, it would have got you! He wasn't thinking of himself; he was only anxious to know that you were all right."

"Ah, mebbe he's got another Hummer on the stocks," said Old Plug.

"The Juggernaut firm's pressing him, Si."

"But he's paid for his demonstration car, I suppose?"

"Yes, partly, and he gave orders for two others on speculation. He knows that they mean to come down on him, and they'll take the demonstration car that he's partly paid for."

Old Plug intimated that his slippers and a hot drink interested him much more at that moment than the troubles of his son John, adding that experience was the only medicine that would cure fools of their folly. "He turned his nose up at my trade," said Old Plug. "Said it wasn't honest. Very well; let's see how he'll shuffle along with his new cars and the dainty office furniture. Lord, they tell me that it smells like a drug store. Would you believe it, woman—he has purple curtains to his windows, and he lets his

stenographer wear white-topped boots. I'll warrant he never wears a linen collar more'n a day, and I do hear that he has his nails manicured if he so much as touches the hood of a car."

CHAPTER IV.

HIGH-SPEED EXCITEMENT.

THE next morning, however, the red waistcoat appeared in the display room of Mr. John. There was one Juggernaut car on exhibition in the room, and the old man was studying it intently when John came out of the office. The younger man's face was grayish in the subdued light; the eyes were swollen and heavy of expression. His father heard him coming down the room, but he did not look up from the car. "What have you got here, John?" he asked.

"That's the Juggernaut, father; listed at seventeen-fifty——"

"And made by——"

"The Apollo Company; only a small firm."

"So they can't afford to do a lot of advertising, John?"

"They're wonderful cars, father; they'll advertise themselves."

"Yes," said Old Plug laconically, "if you fit 'em with a megaphone instead of a regular horn."

"They're beautifully sprung, dad, and I've never come across such upholstery."

"Don't lift the hood, my boy"—as John reached across the wing—"you'll dirty your hands. Besides, I can see through it. I should say this was one of them cars that can do a journey of a hundred miles in a day, if carefully driven——"

"My dear father——"

"——but you'd have to come back by the same route in order to pick up the carburetor and the differential and other small things that you'd dropped going out. And all you get out of this is

twenty-five per cent, eh? Well, if you hurry up, you may sell one before you die, and so be able to pay me back what I dropped on the Hummer."

John turned away from the car and began to walk back to his office. "I didn't know that you'd come over to sneer at me, father," he said reproachfully, yet not without courage. "I've had no luck with them thus far, but if I'd been able to advertise on my own, I think I might have made good."

"Advertise!" exclaimed the old man. "What do you know about advertising?" He followed the boy to the office and leaned against the doorway as John dropped into a chair. A shade of pity came over the old man's face as he looked at the crumpled figure of his son. After all, it takes more than a flivver of a motor car to make a man forget how his son used to look when he was at school. "How's your bank account, John?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know," said John. "I'd thank you to mind your own business." He was sitting now with his elbows on the desk, his hands pressed to his cheeks.

"Well, don't give in," said the old man. "Stick it out to the last, John, so that when your window blinds come down with a rattle you'll get some satisfaction out of knowing that you did your best."

At midday a representative of the Apollo Company called on Mr. Silas Pickleberry to ask him if he was prepared to help his son out of a serious difficulty. "The firm doesn't want to be hard on him," said the representative. "We don't want to close his business, but he's not selling anything, and he owes us money. If, however, we have your assurance——"

Old Plug looked him steadily in the eyes. "Who sent you to me?" he asked. "Was it John?"

"No," said the representative, "it wasn't."

The old man sighed with relief. "Do you know what I think about your car?" he said, hooking his thumbs under his armpits and studying his man. "It's a well-painted rat trap."

"Such bodywork!" the representative expostulated.

"Wonderful!" said Old Plug sneeringly. "I should say that you wouldn't hear the slightest sound from the bodywork when you were running, because the engine would be making such a row. You've come to me to see if I'll back up the mistakes of my son by placing my bank balance at his disposal—and yours? Now I'll have a deal with you. Come down into the display room." He took him down. "See that Glegg? It's a last year's model, lighting set complete. It's a car. I'll take that Juggernaut across the road and one hundred dollars in exchange, and run the risk of being turned down as a fool by every man in the Row. That's my answer to your question: Am I going to back up my son? Serve him right for getting into the mess. Serve you right if you lose on the deal with him."

The representative departed to communicate with his principals. At five o'clock in the evening Spann Brothers, dealers at the end of the Row, called up Old Plug to tell him to keep his eyes wide open, because a woman member of a European royal house was in the Row with her private secretary, intent on inspecting cars.

"She can have the Hummer," said Old Plug to himself, and went on with his work.

Five minutes passed; then Skidden, at the other end of the Row, called up to say that a princess was actually inspecting the Juggernaut car. "You can see her from your windows if you like to look," he said.

The old man remembered that it was Skidden who sold the Hummer car to Mr. John for eight hundred and sev-

enty-five dollars, and he guessed that Skidden would be mightily pleased if the jealousy between father and son were accentuated. All the same, he did look across the Row, and if it must be confessed, he was conscious of a thrill of pride as he saw his son fling open the main doors of the agency and prepare to start up the Juggernaut. The tall, handsome woman standing by with her secretary was speaking to John. Old Plug almost regretted having said what he had said about purple curtains and white-topped boots and smart office fittings. Then the woman stepped into the car, sitting by the side of the driver. The secretary climbed up behind. The car went down the avenue with a musical throb.

Old Plug went back to his desk and shut his eyes. He was sitting there at the end of another hour, when there came a pounding of feet through the display room. The office door was flung open. Skidden, bursting with excitement, almost fell over the desk. "Plug, they've got him! You were right—everything that you said about him was right. I blamed you for turning against your own son, and so did a lot of the other boys, but not now. Great Scott, no—not now!"

"Got him?" Old Plug was on his feet; he had gripped Skidden by the shoulders. "What do you mean—'they've got him?'"

"The Comtesse de Karazinia—that's her name—the lady he took for a trial run this afternoon——"

"Go on—dodgast you! Go on!"

"She's had him arrested."

"He, he! What a joke!"

"It's no joke. She's charged him with theft."

"He, he! Oh, Lord, Hannah! What a joke!"

"Listen, Plug! I'm serious. They've got him. He was hard up; hadn't a red cent. Everybody knew it. He wanted money to settle with the Apollo

Company. That comes of turning his old father down."

"Skidden, Skidden! Don't make me laugh; I've got a split lip."

"She says, and her secretary says, that she took off a diamond-studded bangle in order to try the steering of the car when they were twenty miles out of town. She put it on the seat, and it disappeared. By heavens, Plug, Nemesis has soon overtaken him for playing the serpent to his poor old dad."

Old Plug's cheeks were as red as his waistcoat. He was laughing inordinately. "Skidden, man, you're the funniest beggar I've ever come across. Where did they find the bangle?"

"They haven't found it. Try to be serious, Plug! I mean every word I say. They've got him. He's a snob, a stuck-up jackanapes. He's a thief—and——"

"You're a liar!"

"Plug!"

"A low-bred scoundrel! Thief yourself! Get out!"

"Plug, I'm telling you the truth——"

"Out of my office or I'll brain you! John a thief! My boy a thief! You're a liar! You're all liars!"

CHAPTER V.

A LITTLE BOOKKEEPING.

THREE minutes later the dealers in the Row saw the red waistcoat bobbing in and out of the traffic on its way to the police station, where the agent for the Juggernaut car was detained. John was released on bail after his father, Silas Pickleberry, had cast a most bitter aspersion on the character of the Countess de Karazinia.

"Diamond-studded bangle!" he roared. "I don't believe she had one. Where is she?"

They told him that she had returned to her hotel, and would appear in court on the following day.

"Bet you a million she doesn't!" said

the old man. "She's one of the 'free-trial trippers.' I know the breed. They want a spin in the country for nothing, and pretend to a milk-and-water agent, same as my boy, that they want to buy a car. Let me get at her! I'll whisper a few things in her ear. It won't be a car that she'll want to buy, but ear plugs."

When he and John came out of the police station they had to fight their way through a crowd of people. There were cheers and groans, but there was something in the flash of Old Plug's eye that stilled the groans almost before they were uttered. He put his arm through that of John, and walked proudly, defiantly, down the Row to John's agency.

The car had returned. In the presence of a policeman the old man ripped away the cushions. The bangle was found wedged between the gasoline tank, under the seat and the upholstery. The crowd of dealers who had followed the red waistcoat to the agency raised a loud cheer.

The old man handed the bangle to the police officer. "There you are," he said. "Make a note of the fact that I found it in your presence. Who searched the car? My lad, there'll be a hard time for some of you. There'll be an action for damages for illegal arrest. I'll fight you, if I have to sell my red waistcoat! Now for her ladyship!"

He took John home with him that night, but on the way he assured him that this "disgrace" wasn't likely to bring them closer together. The morning newspapers contained a full account of the affair. "The Case of the Juggernaut Car" was elaborated as only a newspaper man knows how to elaborate such a story.

Since the bangle had been found, the Countess de Karazinia had no alterna-

tive but to withdraw the charge, through her lawyers, and tender her regrets to Mr. John Pickleberry. She disappeared from the hotel at which she had been staying, her secretary informing the management that her regret at having wrongfully accused an innocent dealer was more than she could bear. She was not heard of again.

For several days there was a steady stream of visitors to the Row. Everybody seemed anxious to buy a Juggernaut car, since it had been given so much prominence in the newspapers. John telephoned across to the old man. "Of course," he said, "I was very much obliged to you for the attitude you took over the Karazinia affair. I hadn't a friend in the world in that hour, so I could set a right value on the friendship of my father. All the same, I'd like you to know that I was always satisfied that I'd touched a good proposition when I decided to handle Juggernaut cars! Would you believe that I've placed orders for fifty during the last three or four days?"

Old Plug smiled as he replaced the receiver. From a pigeonhole above his head he took down an old ledger, and, turning over the pages until he reached the "P's," he wrote down:

John Pickleberry, in account with Silas Pickleberry, motor engineer, dealer in new and secondhand cars:

To supplying one elegant female, to play the part of a princess.....	\$10.50
To supplying an out-of-work actor to be private secretary to the same..	3.00
To booming the Juggernaut car as it didn't deserve to be boomed.....	575.00

"Which will square that Hummer deal," he muttered to himself.

To loan of one bangle from his mother's drawer—

"No, I don't see why I should drag the old lady into it," he said, and he put the ledger back.

A Tale of the Picture Players ~

Just for the Jazz-

By
Will Sebell-

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)



CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE-BARRELED IDEA.

TO be in love with the most lovable girl in the world; to have carefully handled the love interest as regards the rules of the game, tempo, construction, and technique, from its entrance into the picture up to the shooting of the climax, the proposal of marriage, and then be turned down, was the experience of Warren Harding of the Eagle Film Agency.

"Wouldn't stand for you, eh?" his partner asked. "Sorry to hear it, Warren. Although she's a banker's daughter, does society, and has her own car and is strictly first class, you're no slouch yourself—big fellow, Olympic Club boxer, and all that. Gee whiz! You've been on that reel for nearly a year, and now this comes as a chaser to your act. Cheer up, old boy. Didn't she care for you?"

They were sitting in the scantily furnished agency. A superabundance of lithographs depicting forthcoming

Eagle stars were hung about; in the street window were frames full of photographs. Near the window a camera stood on its tripod. Around it were a few film boxes.

"Yes," Harding answered; "Ilion cares for me, I am sure; but she simply will not say yes. Just keeps me waiting. I think she's afraid to let her father in on the theme of the picture, and she won't stand for my going to him with my proposition. I'm stumped, Tex."

Texas Jones, small, sharp of features, a broad-brimmed Stetson hat tilted back on his head, arose, shoved his hands into his trousers pockets, walked to the camera, then back to the desk at which Harding was sitting.

"I advise you to drop the affair, Warren. You'll get over it in time. And I want to tell you something. While you've been pulling this love stuff your attention has been out of focus on the game here. We're not placing many Eagle productions. We're falling behind. We owe the telegraph, express, and special-delivery companies.

They all threaten to close us out. By George!"—looking in the direction of the film boxes—"I'd better get my camera out of here or I'll find the sheriff's card on it some morning. If the worst comes to the worst I can go back turning a handle again——"

"Say, look here," Harding snapped; "we're being bunkoed. We don't owe the Eagle people anything, do we? I should say not! They get theirs, plunk down, before we get the productions, and I've noticed that they are releasing fewer and asking more for them——"

"And they're punk at that," Jones cut in.

"Punk's the word," Harding agreed. "Too much slapstick. Not like their early productions. Those were humorous, had plot, action, and sequence. They sold us at reasonable prices. We sold the city and up-country houses at reasonable prices. Everybody made a piece of change. What do we get now? Fewer and more costly productions. They're all stars. They take their time. Too many reputations to sustain and fat-contract salaries to be paid. They soak us poor agency fellows all over the country; we soak the show houses; they stick it on the people in the shape of fifteen-cent admissions as against a former five, and the answer is the loss of business all around. The people will not crowd the houses to look at punk reels at that price. The show houses are cutting their orders to us.

"We'll have to do something," Harding went on. "This star business, big-salaried managers, directors, and laboratory cost that is boosting prices is getting my goat." Harding picked up a letter from the big agency and read from it. "Expert direction—expensive settings—technique—twenty thousand dollars to produce a two-reel comedy," he mimicked. "Bah!"

That night, in bed, Harding pondered his predicament—the collapse of his love affair with Ilion Howard, and the

impending collapse of his business. Well, it would be tough. When the smash came, if it did, little Texas Jones could drop back on a salary and do camera work for some company. He was a genius with the camera, that little, dark-haired fellow. He had perspective and an eye for light and shadows. That's what would become of Jones.

As to himself? Back to the telegraph game, to the task of listening to a sounder clattering in a resonator and the drudgery of putting five words on a line. And then, riding into a fanciful picture in his brain, as real as if he were gazing through a camera, came a red roadster. Contrasting in color scheme, a golden-haired girl sat at the wheel. Ilion! As the roadster passed he saw her blue eyes look at him, saw a sad smile flicker over her sweet mouth. As silently and as gracefully as she had entered the picture she passed out of it.

"Afraid to tell her father, or let me tell him," Harding muttered. "Afraid I wouldn't suit—maybe. Not in his class."

After thinking deeply for a while, he exclaimed: "An idea! A double-barreled, two-in-one idea! Gosh, it's funny how hunches and ideas come at times. Jones will be tickled when he hears this one. It'll make money for us; but I'll not tell Jonesy the other side of the idea, the twin side. Gosh, it's a good one, a regular pippin!" Smiling, he dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

UP FOR THE LAST ROUND.

IN the morning, his face ruddy after a shave, a soft, tweed hat curled back from his forehead, a flower in his buttonhole, all enthusiasm, Harding rushed into the Eagle Film Agency as Jones was opening the mail.

"Hey, Tex," Harding shouted, "I've

got an idea, a good one, a pippin, one we can make some money out of——"

"Yeh?"

"Sure. I've noticed lately that the letters we've been getting from our show houses ask for good, straightaway comedies, something with action and climax."

"I've got one from the Ajax Theater on that subject now," said Jones. "They say they refuse to pay two hundred for an Eagle all-star production. The Ajax people say that they charge ten cents admission and that that goes, though they would not object to purchasing some good films at reasonable prices and——"

"Good!" Harding exclaimed. "Now for my money-making idea." He should have said the half of his idea that had to do with money-making. "We'll make two-reel comedies ourselves. We can do it. I've thought it all out."

Jones looked up, surprised. "Say, Warren, if we're on the verge of going bust, if we can't produce anything to settle bills with, how do you figure we can blossom out as producers of two-reelers?" he asked.

Harding laughed. "It reminds me of a bout I had one exhibition night at the club," he said. "When I came up for the last round I was practically defeated—all in. I just stalled, waiting. A chance came. I sent in a desperate wallop that won for me. Our game here is in the same condition, Tex. It's up for the last round. It's wobbly. We can last a month longer, anyway. In that time we've got to put our punch over."

"Well?"

"We'll do it," Harding declared. "I'll advertise for scenarios, something light, funny, actionable. We'll pick out one, collect our cast, and get to work. We'll produce something. With our clientele, we put it out at reasonable rates. Every show house on our list will use it. We get the whole thing—won't have to pay

any fancy prices to a big film agency. We shall be planted squarely on our own feet. We shall get good pay for good work, and, by thunder, we can do that!"

"You forget, Warren," said Jones, "that there are the cast, costumes, setting, and laboratory work to be paid for. How about it?"

"Leave the cast to me. I'll jockey it through at a very nominal expense. Our expertness in choosing an apt script will eliminate most of the cost. You and I will do as much of the work as we can. You're the director and camera man for the job. I'll be leading man. The costumes will be another item to keep in mind when choosing a script. The city here and the State is full of setting. The only requisite needed is the nerve to go out and shoot it.

"The great American public is getting tired of this painted setting stuff, Tex," Harding continued. "They like big action and the open places, something that leaves the boy and girl on a knoll overlooking a big expanse of country as the sun sinks below the line and pulls all the light out of the scene. That's what I want to do—project something big, something that will ring true, that will get away from a suggestion of paint, props, or devices and film trickery. The laboratory work, I will admit, will be the chief item of our expense."

Texas Jones was silent. Harding's thoughts, also, wafted from the conversation. That sun-kissed fade-out he had just mentioned pleased him immensely. That or a like situation would have to figure in his picture in order to dovetail with the other half of the idea he was reserving for himself.

"What's the matter, Tex?" he asked, pulling himself away from his cherished fancy. "Don't you think well of the scheme? Don't want to do footage for me, eh?"

"Sure I do, Warren," Jones replied. "I was just thinking about the last big picture I was to shoot, but didn't; a year ago, on Long Island, when I put everything I had in the world into a fund to develop a feature, and Gleason, big, crafty, debonair, ducked out with the sack. I learned later that he was a notorious crook, Gentleman George, a confidence worker. All my savings were lost. I was lucky to have a camera; to get a job and come West."

"Ever heard of Gleason since?"

"That dirty crook!" Jones' eyes contracted, flashed. He was not usually given to black moods. "Never heard of him again. He pulled his game just as the police reports said he had pulled them all—his manners, dress, and suave diplomacy, you know. Double speed at the climax, a quick flash and exit from the picture. But that's all done with. Sure, I'll shoot the picture for you. We'll make the agency pay yet."

"Fine, Tex, little pal," said Harding. "I'll get the ad for scenarios started today."

Later, returning from the newspaper office, Harding saw Ilion in her red roadster coming slowly up the street. He waved to her. She curved from the line of automobiles, came to the curbing, and stopped the engine.

"You haven't called for a week, Warren," she said. "Whatever is the matter with you?"

For a short time Harding did not speak. He just gazed on the embodiment of that which, to him, was all the word beauty implied. In her little toque, nestling over her abundance of blond hair, in her automobile veil and dress she seemed irresistible; a delicate, tantalizing something.

He spoke at last: "You don't want me to call, Ily——"

"There you go again with that silly name," she interrupted. "Of course I want you to. But you have such absurd ideas."

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"No, you don't," he insisted. He stood close to the roadster, one foot on the running board, his hands on the wheel before her, looking into her eyes. "You know why I call you Ily—it does for a shortening of your own dear name and lets you know just where you stand with me every time I call you by it or write it. You know what those three letters mean."

"Warren Harding, if you don't stop this nonsense, I'll drive on. The idea! Making love to me in a crowded street! Or do you think this is some sort of a matter-of-fact business procedure?" She was laughing. "Really, Warren, you've been associated with the moving pictures so long that the intimacy you assume with life has warped your finer sensibilities."

"Ily," he said seriously; "I don't understand you."

"Goody! Goody!" she exclaimed, clapping her gloved hands. "Dear old grandma told me quite a while ago always to keep the menfolks guessing."

"I refuse to be kept on the anxious seat," said Harding sternly. "I either win or I lose."

"Really?"

"I must know. You do care for me, Ily. You've told me so time and again. You did, now! Don't start to fidget! I don't care if it is a busy street. My finer sensibilities are warped, you know. I want you, Ily. Say yes."

The girl shook her head. "Not now, Warren. Do be patient." She ran the gas up on the quadrant, gave her foot a little stamp, and started the engine.

"Let me go to your father, explain, and have it out with him," he pleaded.

"No, Warren," she answered, moving the roadster forward slowly. "Coming out to see me this evening? Dad's going out with Mr. Brace Sheldon."

"No," he snapped. "Tell your grandmother all the men in the world don't want to get in on her guessing

contest. I don't even know or care who Sheldon is."

Emitting a spiteful backfire puff from the exhaust, the little roadster jumped forward and was off.

"All right, little girl," muttered Harding, gazing after the disappearing car; "you go back to grandma and get some more ammunition. Me? Why, the Eagle Film Agency is calling me. Tex and I must go over our list and see if we can't place a few of those high-priced two-reelers. To-morrow our scenarios will start to float in—then—I'll bet when I shoot the climax of the picture I have in mind all the grandmas in the country can't hold you back, girlie—can't keep you from guessing."

CHAPTER III.

"GLOVES AND THE GIRL."

THE next day the scenarios started.

The mail of the Eagle Film Agency was heavy. Harding, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, sat before his desk and slit open long, bulky envelopes.

"How's the editor?" asked Texas Jones from under his broad-brimmed Stetson.

"Fine, Tex," Harding replied. "Load your camera. Stick close, in readiness. When I find a script that suits I'll give a surprised yeli; then we'll mail a check with our compliments and get busy."

"I know," Jones answered; "but what's the prospects? How do the samples shape up?"

"See that stack over there?" asked Harding, pointing. "Punko! Distorted ideas with million-dollar settings, extravaganzas, burning hotels, ship collisions, and those that have likely plots have no perspective. Oh, I'll be a beaut of a scenario editor, I can tell you! But I've learned one thing so far, Tex. We'll have to use a good synopsis and develop our action.

"These birds don't know how to put the stuff across," he went on. "I tossed

one aside a little while ago that seemed fairly good, a university, foot-race tale. Perspective and atmosphere were good. Inexpensive, you know. We could slide over to Berkeley and do the college stuff—campus, cinder path, and all, but the plot was watery; too much of the for-the-honor-of-the-dear-old-college sob in it. Something may show up with an equally good setting, as good atmosphere and more dynamite in the plot."

"Go to it, Warren," said Jones. "Don't be too blamed technical, though. Remember, I can slide around some pretty tough places with the camera. I can shoot almost any kind of a scene. And don't pass up any good night actions. I can film that stuff while I burn powdered daylight from a pan."

Harding resumed his reading, occasionally leaning back, cigarette in hand, thinking deeply. Near the camera, Texas Jones tinkered.

Three days later, during which time he had not seen Ilion, though she had rung him up on the telephone several times, Warren Harding found himself in the same predicament. She would not give him an answer. He was sitting at his desk, still searching for a suitable scenario.

"If it wasn't for the other half of my big idea," he muttered to himself, "I would have taken that college script with the understanding that we could throw in a thrill or two. But my idea calls for a situation that is just so; it must contain a lively and definite situation."

He bent again to his task. And then, late in the afternoon, after reading an interesting, well-written script, he let out his yell of surprise.

"Oh, Tex! Hither! Eureka!" he cried. "Here it is! 'Gloves and the Girl.' We'll go over it together."

Jones came smilingly to the desk and sat down.

"A very actionable script," said

Harding. "Listen: A promoter in the little country town of Orwood and a couple of sporty farmers decide to hold a boxing exhibition. As a climax to the night's entertainment, they decide to have a bout between two regular pugs. They get things going. Look in Frisco papers for the names of pugilistic celebrities. They decide on two middleweights, a Kid Smotch and J. McKay. They telegraph both. Address J. McKay, care Oasis Café. Follow me?"

"I am drinking it all in," replied Jones.

"All right; then let this percolate. A certain Jack McRae, an entertainer, is employed at the Oasis. He is standing near a piano when a messenger boy comes in, hands him a telegram, takes his receipt, and leaves. He doesn't notice that the telegram is addressed to a J. McKay. He just opens and reads it. It is from the promoter in Orwood, and reads: 'Engagement for you here. Come up immediately. Expense and bonus on arrival.' It tickles him. He thinks it was sent as a result of his teammate's rustling. It had been agreed that his partner, Bob, was to go ahead to dig up a job where they could stage their act double. He quits the Oasis."

"Plenty of action so far," said Jones, "and interesting scenery——"

"Sure," Harding cut in. "The opening in the country town—modern rubes and all that will be great. And the café stuff. Some color to it! The seadateness of the upcountry making a contact with the swirl of city life will be a fine contrast."

"Now, then," Harding went on, "this McRae bird, the café yodler, looks Orwood up on the railroad schedule next morning. Learns it is two hundred miles away. Will take about all his cash to get there. He buys a ticket and takes the first train out. After long trip, arrives at Orwood, a platform

station with a sign on it. The country promoter drives up in a flivver and greets him. Thinks he is J. McKay, fighter. The horrible mistake dawns on Jack McRae. He thinks about his predicament and insufficient funds and decides to play J. McKay, fighter, for the time. You see, it is all open-country stuff, easy to film.

"The promoter drives him to the Orwood Hotel where the rest of the boxing committee calls on him, sizes him up, feels his muscles, and tells him he will be presented with a bonus check for training at the hotel. We should be able to grind out some good footage on the hotel episode."

"I see," said Jones. "We can save footage by not filming Kid Smotch in training. We can work it in so that fact will be intimated—accepted."

"Precisely," said Harding. "Now," he continued, laughing, "the complication starts here. This fake pug, McRae, starts to take life easy at the hotel—loafs around, plays pool, and spends a great deal of time at the piano. The promoter lights on his neck. Tells him to start training, or he won't get the bonus. McRae gets nervous. Afraid some one will detect the deception. He decides to do a little sham training. Gets a pair of tennis slippers and a pair of running trunks and starts in the back yard of the hotel. Plenty of action here. He shadow boxes, skips rope, punches bag, and capers around before an interested, jocular crowd. We can do that scene, easy. You see, McRae intends to get the bonus and skip out. While stalling a few days, McRae has attended a country dance and gets smitten by a little dame." Secretly Harding chuckled. "Get me, Tex, a dame—the love interest, you know——"

"Aw, can't we cut the minor love theme?"

"No! Why, good heavens, Tex, you wouldn't think of changing the author's

lines, would you? It's down in the script here."

"Oh, well, I guess I'll have to stand for it. I'm sick of close-up mugging, though."

Harding continued: "McRae gets stuck on the girl. Has a picture of her on his bureau in the hotel. Then Bob shows up——"

"How will you account for that?" Jones asked.

"The script provides for that. Didn't it specifically mention that McRae's teammate was up the road somewhere trying to land a job for both of them?"

"Oh, yes; so it did."

"Well, Robert rambles into the picture. He has traced Jack, who explains everything. Bob is delighted. Tells Jack he will act as his sparring partner until the bonus advance is made; then they will skip. Humorous part here, Tex. We can intensify it a little—nervousness—study of railroad schedules, and touches like that.

"Two days before the fight Jack gets a check for the advance. Bob is tickled; throws cap in the air. Wants Jack to leave right away. McRae grows serious, meditates, refuses to go. Tells Bob the charming little girl has worked a change in him. Shows him her picture. Tells him he has promised her that it will be his last fight; impresses on Bob that he has taken the good things that should have gone to McKay, fighter; that rather than sneak away and be a quitter in his girl's eyes he is resolved to stay and endeavor to sustain Jimmy McKay's reputation as a glove man. Bob is surprised and disappointed, but sees the ethical side of it. Shakes McRae's hand and agrees to act as his second."

"Good stuff there," Jones commented.

"Good! I should say!" Harding went on: "That's the smash of the story, Tex, the topper to the leading-up circumstances showing how a fine little girl influenced a big action for the bet-

ter; how she kept two young men from doing something really criminal.

"Now comes the day of the fight. After the preliminaries are over, Jack, in running suit and tennis slippers, with Bob, leaves his dressing room. Kid Smotch, a hard-looking professional, is sitting in his corner of the ring, waiting. McRae has the fight of his life, but manages to knock Smotch out in the fourteenth round. The fade-out shows the girl and McRae sitting on a knoll, in a love scene, plighting their troth. What do you think of it, Tex?"

"Fine! There will be many asides and chances to develop additional humor and action as we go along."

The two partners shook hands. Harding was to mail a check accepting the script, take it home with him, and draw up a brief, showing what work he would do and what work he would leave to dynamic little Jones. If the picture was a success, it would go a long way toward establishing them in a company of their own. Of such things, large in conception, inexpensive, needful of unstinted American energy and determination, are great enterprises started.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN OF HIS OWN DESTINY.

UNTIL late in the night Harding worked on the script, dividing the work, marking that which he thought Jones could handle, blocking out actions, thinking of and listing suitable locations, selecting apt people to fill the rôles of the characters needed.

"I'll be Jack McRae," he decided, writing his own name on the working script before him. "That's settled. Tex tells me I'm a good subject. Tex will have to pick the other leading characters, Bobby, my partner and"—a broad smile spread over his face—"my sweetheart. I'll caution him to get a classy dame, one that has beauty and an aptitude for good pictures. Those are the

only two that will cost us real money. The other characters like Kid Smotch, the promoter, and the rubes we can pick up any time. Texas can arrange for them."

Only once was he disturbed, late at night, just before he retired. The telephone bell tinkled. It was Ilion. She had just returned from the theater and was anxious to know if he were home. No; she was not ready to give her answer, or permit him to interview her father on the subject. He must wait.

"Ily," he had said, "I'm not coming out again until I know that I have a fair chance to win. It looks like this deal is being framed on me—if you'll excuse the slang. It looks like some one is keeping me in the corners and shadows of the picture. You've been to the show with papa and Mr. Brace Sheldon, most likely?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Good night, Ily," he said quickly. "My regards to your grandma." He hung up the receiver.

Harding stood, thinking, before his work again. "Brace Sheldon," he muttered. "Some silk-stockinged, blue-blooded son of a seventh son. I'd like to punch his darned head for him." He resumed his work, thoughts of Ilion still flitting across his mind. He complimented himself on his choice of the scenario. It was so apt, afforded such a masterful, double stroke.

"It will take two weeks to make the picture," he decided. "Before it is finished I shall have Ilion's answer."

He felt sure of that, as he retired. There was no doubt in his mind but that he was the captain of his own destiny; that he had to seek his own vantage ground, pitch his battle on it, and win it there.

Two days later, Texas Jones announced that he was ready to shoot the piece.

"I've got a Bobby and a girl," he said, "but I haven't hit on a good Kid

Smotch yet. A fellow named Chester Doran, who has been doing light junior work around Hollywood, has agreed to do the Bobby act almost for nothing, just to give us a lift. I'll pick up a hard, villainous-looking Smotch before we need him."

"Who is to be—sweetheart?" Harding asked.

"Cloise Del Mar, recently of the Season's Follies. Folly to come this far, you know. Disbanded here. Found her at the booking agency, discouraged because she couldn't book right out over another circuit. She'll see our picture through."

"Good looker?" asked Harding.

"Some movie queen, believe me! Black-haired, fine eyes, and profile. A little noisy in dress, but when she gets plain duds on in the country and becomes simple, true-blue little Helen of the farm country, her looks, soulful eyes, and acting are going to register some love scene, take it from your Uncle Texas here."

"All right," said Harding, arising; "that's the vital point with me. Now let's on with the play."

The days that followed were long and tedious for the little company. A crowded café, with Harding as McRae at the piano receiving the plot-inciting telegram was arranged for and filmed. The packing of his valise in his room, the railroad depot, his looking through time-tables and exit in a train, his arrival at Orwood, a number of scenes about the platform depot, concluding with the action in which the promoter mistakes him for the real fighter, were filmed; also the hotel scenes up to and including the loafing, pool and piano playing.

Ilion kept ringing Harding up from time to time. This time it was over the long-distance telephone to the hotel in Orwood, where he had told the girl he was going to film a picture.

"Yes," he was saying; "we are get-

ting pretty well along with it. Little Texas is out trying to dig up a suitable Kid Smotch. To-morrow we shoot a few hundred feet of love stuff. What's that? Is there a girl in the cast? Sure thing! Like? Swell looker! Name? Cloise Del Mar. Yes, sure, I play opposite her. Well, I've got to put some realism in my part. Yes; just acting, of course. We register love, you know—what's that—yes—love, but, of course, we have to do the thing so it will get across. Yes; sure we allow visitors. Come up, Ily. Glad to have you."

A broad smile was spreading across his face once more as he hung up the receiver.

That evening found Jones in a blue funk. "No use," he said to Harding. "I can't seem to land a good Smotch. He's got to be some brute, you know, a tough fellow who can register good action and who can take a good beating."

Harding looked wonderingly at the little man sitting tilted back in his chair, smoking a cigarette, his feet resting on the end of the bed.

"Sure, Warren," he went on; "no kidding; that's the big scene, that scrap, where you sustain Jimmy McKay's reputation. I've got it all doped out. The ring will be pitched up against the bleachers in one corner of the football field. I'll pick out a good light aspect and pack that corner with all kinds of people, background, you know. It'll look like a section of a twenty-thousand pack when I get a focus on it, and in order to excite 'em you and the Smotch I dig up will have to show up a good bout."

"Leave it to me," said Harding. "You pick out a Smotch who can stand a reasonably good beating, and I'll hand it to him for the good of the picture. Take your time about engaging him. To-morrow afternoon we do the love scene."

CHAPTER V.

FOR THE SAKE OF REALISM.

THE following afternoon, with Cloise Del Mar, Chester Doran, and a number of Orwood's young people whom energetic, irrepressible Texas Jones had gathered together, the footage of the country-dance episode was shot. The fake Jimmy McKay met the gingham-dressed, bonnet-hanging, laughing, sweet country girl. Cloise Del Mar was playing opposite Warren Harding while, close up, turning a handle, Texas Jones directed.

"We've got the dance scene," he said. "This is between dances. You're acquainted with the girl now. It's supposed to be moonlight. You're strolling about, like the other couples. Register love, now! You're spooning, you know. Remember, Warren, I'm cracking off eight pictures to each turn. Come across with good action and get it over with. Now, then!"

The couples were sauntering about the outside of the dance hall. Cloise Del Mar, smiling, looking up into Harding's face, took his arm. They were about to start their leisurely stroll when the rumbling of an automobile came to their ears. A red roadster, with a girl behind the wheel, was rolling down on the scene.

"Ilion!" Harding exclaimed. "I knew it! A whole trainload of grandmas couldn't keep her away."

The girl drove up, shut off the engine, and got out. "Hello, Warren!" she called.

"Hello, Ily!" Harding answered, somewhat embarrassed. "Get my message at the hotel, saying where to find us?"

"Yes; Mr. Sheldon got it and gave it to me."

"He came up with you?" Harding's voice was stern.

"Yes; for company, you know. He's waiting for me at the hotel."

"Time!" called Texas Jones, crouching behind the camera again. "Ready, now. Stroll past me, here. Remember, the girl looks good to you. She looks up into your eyes and you look down into hers—you know, you're both jockeying for a start in the love game. Let 'er go!"

They started, Harding all attention, looking down at the girl on his arm, smiling, acting the cavalier. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ilion Howard standing a few feet away, a puzzled, worried look overcasting her face.

"Fine!" yelled Jones, as the couple passed him. "That's done with. I'll notch this film and meet you at the hotel in a little while."

The small crowd, laughing and joking, dispersed. Even Chester Doran and Cloise Del Mar left.

"Well, Ily," said Harding to the girl near the roadster, "how do you like the picture game?"

"You seem to like it," she replied poutingly.

"Me—why?"

"Oh, you think I can't see? Your acting was marvelous. 'Remember, the girl looks good to you—you register love——'" she mimicked, looking after Jones, who was walking in the direction of the hotel, carrying his camera and film box. "The detestable little beast!" she exclaimed. Then to Harding: "Oh, you registered love, all right!"

Harding was laughing. The thing he cherished was manifest. If she would only say yes.

"Ily," he said, "what's troubling you? You know we're turning out a great picture."

"Warren," she voiced plaintively, catching the lapel of his coat, "you don't really like her, do you?"

"Why, Ily ——"

"You danced with her, and—what is that absurd, detestable word—oh, yes, you registered love with her."

"That's nothing," he replied, taking advantage of the situation, "I kiss her at the fade-out——"

"Warren!"

"Well, remember what your grandmother told you about the men? I must have guessed wrong. I couldn't get your answer, Ily. There wasn't any more to be done, was there?"

But there was. He saw when he had driven his advantage far enough, when the sweet, blue-eyed, golden-haired girl before him was on the verge of tears, so he adroitly lessened the tension and maneuvered her to the roadster. Over the long, circuitous route they took to reach the hotel, he registered love, real love, and there was no camera man near them reeling it in. Arrived at the hotel, Texas Jones, a scowl on his face, his dark eyes contracted, motioned him aside for a private talk. Something had happened.

"We do the big scene in an hour," said Jones.

"The what?" asked Harding, surprised.

"The topper, the climax, the fight in which you knock out Smotch——"

"Why, Tex, I thought that came off to-morrow; that you hadn't found a Smotch."

"I've found a Smotch. The light will be good for a few hours yet. I've sent Doran and a couple of scouts to get enough supers to pack a focus side of the ring. Be ready to leave in a half hour."

"All right, Tex," Harding answered, rejoining Ilion who had entered the hotel.

"Does he want you to do that kissing scene now?" she inquired.

"No; that's for the final, the fade-out," he said. The second part, the uncommercial side of his big idea, was working out better than he had anticipated, though, in spite of it, she would not say yes. "You see, Ily," he went on, "the script calls for a fade-out

with the boy and girl sitting on a knoll, looking over a large expanse of country as the sun goes down and pulls all the light out of the scene. The picture begins to darken as the boy takes the girl in his arms and kisses her."

They spent an unhappy half hour. It was time for her to leave, if she was to arrive at her home early that evening, though Mr. Brace Sheldon, her companion on the trip, and who was to have awaited her at the hotel, was absent. She had mentioned him once or twice, and in a way that caused Harding to suspect that she had brought Sheldon to vex him.

"I'd like to punch his head," he had muttered to himself. It was a keen disappointment. He had hoped to get a look at his rival, but now he would have to leave without seeing him, to do the climax of "Gloves and the Girl" for little Tex.

"If he doesn't return in a little while, I'll motor back without him," Ilion said determinedly.

"Good!" Harding exclaimed. "If I knew what he looks like and saw him up the road, I'd tie him up for an hour or so."

They were sitting in the reception room of the hotel. Texas Jones looked in at the door and beckoned.

"Warren," she said, as he stood up, ready to leave, "tell me you don't really like that actress girl."

"I hardly know her."

"About that fade-out, Warren. Can't you sit quite far away from her? You mustn't really kiss her, must you?"

"For the sake of realism and the success of the picture—yes," he answered, with some decision.

"I'm coming up again to-morrow," she declared.

"Fine!" he cried. He was winning. "Good-by, Ily," he added, stooping over and kissing her. Then he hurried out.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE TWELFTH ROUND.

AFTER a half hour's ride in an old buggy, Harding and Texas Jones arrived at the football field. As they walked toward the bleachers, they could see a little crowd in one section.

"Took about all the money I had to pull this," Jones complained. "I've got just enough film to do the fight. We can't do it over, so make it a go, a real fight."

Chester Doran met them. Texas Jones leaned over and whispered to Harding, who stopped in sheer amazement. "Impossible!" he exclaimed. "You're kidding me?"

"No; absolute truth. No time to explain now. I'll do that later. I want a real go."

"You'll see a real go, all right," said Harding, hurrying after Doran.

Arrived at the improvised ring near the bleachers, the little crowd cheered and packed closer. Texas Jones took charge. Harding slipped into a dressing room under the seats and changed to ring attire, tennis slippers and running trunks. When he returned, Texas had the scene ready. The camera was focused; a referee was in the ring, holding the gloves; Chester Doran was also in the ring, waiting, a towel over his arm. In one corner was a large, hard-looking man.

"All right, Mr. Brace Sheldon," Harding muttered to himself, as he climbed through the ropes, "I've already said I'd like to punch your head. Now I'm going to do it."

"Ready!" called Texas Jones from the camera. "Action in the crowd there! Remember, you're seeing a crackajack fight. Shoot excitement into the camera. Now, gentlemen—to the men in the ring—"remember, this is to be some go. One-minute rounds. In the fourteenth round big Smotch gets his——"

"That won't stop me from slapping this fellow on the wrist a few times up to the fake knock-out, will it?" Sheldon asked sarcastically.

"Certainly not," Harding flung at him. "Shoot in everything you know. In the fourteenth I'm going to see if I can't turn the real thing, for the good of the picture——"

"That's the darby!" Jones shouted. "Fine! All set? Now, McRae, alias McKay, do your best! You're trying to win the girl. The terrible Kid Smotch is in front of you. Let 'er go!"

It was a real fight. From the first Harding tore into his opponent, and soon noted that this other was no novice. Sheldon was as hard a fighter as had ever faced him in club bouts. Harding, time after time, sent the husky fellow before him staggering about the ring, but Sheldon always recuperated quickly and come right back, inflicting punishment. Harding fought on, round after round, doggedly, wondering who the man before him really was; how he had met Ilion and become an honored visitor to her home; how, in the name of all that was conceivable, little Texas Jones had prevailed upon him to take the grueling part of Kid Smotch. Something was wrong, somewhere.

The crowd cheered in earnest. As the bout neared the tenth round, both men were in a bad way; both were battered. Then it was that Harding's better condition began to tell; then it was that Sheldon's real nature showed; he began deliberately striking low.

In the twelfth round, after his last flagrant attempt to foul, came the knock-out. Harding, in pain, enraged at last, telling himself that the man before him was in some way responsible for the collapse of his affair with Ilion, followed viciously after the crouching Sheldon, actually pounded an opening, and ended the contest.

The crowd yelled and jumped about. As Harding stepped down through the ropes he noticed Jones still turning the handle, doing footage. With that expert the drama then taking place in the ring was of absorbing interest.

In the dressing room, treating his bruises and dressing, Harding heard the noise of the crowd thin and die away, dispersing. In another room, he knew, Brace Sheldon was being attended to. When he was ready to leave, Texas Jones entered the room.

"Shake, Warren," said Jones, offering his hand. "You've evened up an old score for me to-day."

"I did?"

"Sure. You gave Gleason, alias Gentleman George, alias Brace Sheldon, confidence worker, crook, the boy who skipped out with my money in the East, the beating of his life. Much obliged."

Harding was nonplused. "Gleason!" he repeated. "So that's the hound who has been cutting me out with Ilion, who, under the name of Brace Sheldon, seems to have become a friend of her father's."

"It is just like him—confidence worker, you know," said Jones. "Old man Howard is rich; has an attractive daughter. Big prospects. Warren, old scout, you've had a pretty close call. Too bad we didn't run across this bird sooner. Maybe you can go ahead and shoot the climax of *your* picture now—your proposal of marriage—and make a success of it. The light is much better than it was at the start."

CHAPTER VII.

PLAYING BOTH ENDS.

HARDING and Jones had strolled to the field again. Gleason was getting into an automobile. "Get him, Tex—arrest him," said Harding. "He skipped with your money. He's sneaking away. Shall I stop him?"

"Nothing doing. It's part of the agreement. He was to help me make the picture, then duck out of this section of the country, pronto! under penalty of being locked up if I clap my peckers on him again."

In the buggy once more, with camera, tripod, and film boxes, on their way to the hotel, Jones related his meeting with Gleason.

"After I notched the film at the dance hall, I left you chatting with Miss Howard. I saw I wouldn't be missed, so I strolled on. When I reached the hotel, there was Jimmy Gleason all dolled up, sitting on the porch, smoking a fat cigar. He dropped it when he saw me. It was a close-up, and his face registered the danglest surprise you ever want to look at.

"I'm a sport, you know, Warren," Jones went on, "a regular sport. I put the junk I was carrying down, walked over, and made the gentleman a proposition: to play Smotch for me or I'd have him pinched for the wad he did me for back East. Oh, it wasn't easy! He gave me a lot of chin music. Told me to soft pedal the Gleason name; that he was known as Brace Sheldon in the city; that he was mixed up in a little business deal with an old codger, Horace Howard; that he had motored up to Orwood with Howard's daughter and was then waiting for her——"

"The blamed skunk!" Harding cut in.

"Just a minute, Warren," Jones continued. "I saw it all in a flash. Here was the Brace Sheldon you had mentioned to me. I went at him stronger. I insisted then that he play Smotch, and added to the stipulation that he leave for parts unknown after his act. He finally agreed. I kept him out of sight till I called you. Whether he leaves or not is a question."

"He'll leave, all right," said Harding.

"You see," Jones continued, smiling, "when I found out all about him I was more anxious than ever to have him play Smotch. I wanted, first, good action for our picture; also, I wanted that fellow thoroughly whipped, and it struck me that I could have the thing accomplished best by just whispering to you before you stepped into the ring that the gent you were to mix with was none other than Brace Sheldon, reserving the Gleason identity for later mention."

"Sort of played both ends toward the center, eh?" Harding asked.

"It didn't hurt any," Jones returned, stopping the buggy in front of the hotel; "and the go you fellows put up injected plenty of jazz into the picture."

"Well," Harding remarked wistfully, "I notice the absence of a red roadster that stood here a while ago. Our picture is nearly finished. After we film the love-scene fade-out to-morrow, 'Gloves and the Girl' will be completed. I'm banking on a little happening. If it turns out as I expect, I'll let you in on something. You are not the only one who can play both ends toward the center—who can shoot double."

Tired, they entered the hotel to await the return of Chester Doran and Cloise Del Mar.

Long into the night Harding pondered the affair. The mist was beginning to clear. So Brace Sheldon was the notorious Gentleman George, confidence worker? So he was interested in a business way with Ilion's father? Probably, in a clever manner, had ingratiated himself with Howard, and, with the old gentleman's consent, was courting Ilion; she was to be a means to an end. Well, little Texas had put the quietus on his plans. Harding was eager to see her, but held himself in check. To-morrow would have to tell the tale; true love would have to re-

spond. His two-in-one idea, though nearly spent, was still workable. On the practicable side, only the fade-out remained to be filmed; on his personal side, sleep—caressing, thought-banishing—came upon him.

Late the following day, while waiting for the sun to reach a propitious point near the western line, while the rest of the cast played the old piano and waited in the reception room, Harding sat in a chair on the porch, smoking, wondering, hoping.

After all, other than filming a good picture, was his idea of no avail? It seemed so—ah, what was that? Sounded like the purr of an automobile engine. Yes; it was! Looking up the dusty, tree-sided, country road, he saw a car turn from the national highway. As it came nearer, he saw it was a red roadster with but one person in it. Ilion! The love call! He was winning! She was coming to him. And he had a surprise for her.

"Am I in time for the last scene?" she asked, after he had greeted her.

What an apt question! As if she knew what was in his mind. "You bet you are, Ily," he replied. "I was waiting for you."

"Waiting?" she asked.

She was still seated in the roadster. He was standing as he had stood once before, leaning on the steering wheel, looking into her face.

"Yes, waiting, Ily. Somehow, I think your actions of the last few weeks have been due to your father and Brace Sheldon. Now that he has been shown up as a criminal——"

"A what?" the girl interrupted.

"A criminal, a crook with a string of aliases," replied Harding. "He pulled off a steal on little Texas Jones back East, and Tex spotted him yesterday. Tex made some kind of a proposition whereby Sheldon was to leave real sudden."

"That explains why he failed to return yesterday," she said, delight showing in her face. "Also a heated conversation father held with him over the telephone last night. I never did like him, Warren. Father had met and entered into a deal with him. I'm sure he thought he was an honorable and influential man. Father invited him to the house, and hinted to me that he would be a very desirable catch. That was when you asked your question and wanted to take the matter up with father. It wouldn't have done any good. Don't you see, silly, I had to kill off father's prospect and pave the way for you?"

"I see, Ily," he said. "And you are ready to answer my question now?"

"Yes."

He leaned over the wheel——

"Here, there! Cut!" cried Texas Jones as he came out on the porch. "Come on, Warren, it's time to shoot the fade-out."

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH DIPLOMATIC AID.

TWENTY minutes later, two automobiles, the first containing Texas Jones, Cloise Del Mar, Chester Doran, camera, film boxes, and accessories, the second, a red roadster with Ilion Howard and Warren Harding in it, arrived at a point where a great expanse of country showed. The sun was sinking toward the line.

Harding stepped over to Jones, who was adjusting his camera, and whispered to him. "Good!" said Jones, extending his hand. "Congratulations, old scout! Got the right focus at last and shot the picture, eh? Sure, we can work in the touch you mention. Leave it to me.

"Now," Jones called, his hand on the handle of the camera, "step over here, Cloise and Warren." Cloise Del Mar, in a gingham dress and big sunbonnet,

stepped over near him. Harding followed.

"Remember," Jones cautioned, "this is the culmination of a strange romance. The roustabout yodler who intercepted the fighter's telegram has come up to Orwood and met you, Cloise, and changed his spots, as it were; has become ethical. He's just licked Kid Smotch. He's not going back to the city—not going to yodle any more. You both meet and walk lovingly, hand in hand, out toward the sun, sit down on the knoll, plight your troth, and kiss. Now, then, hand in hand. That's it! Now, try it over once"—Harding gave him a quick, wondering glance—"just to the knoll over there," Jones added.

They walked, hand in hand, laughingly, jauntily into the picture. Arrived at the knoll, Jones yelled: "All rights reserved on the rest of it! We'll shoot the piece now."

Once again, while he turned the handle, they did the short stroll. At the knoll, while Harding was pointing toward the sun, Jones quit turning. "All right," he called. "Come back. Now, Cloise, just slip that gown and sunbonnet off. Miss Howard! Oh, here you are! Just take this duster arrangement from Miss Del Mar."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because," said Harding, laughing, glad to break the surprise he had been holding from her, "you are going to do the fade-out with me. Our picture has been animated with realism from the first foot of film. Let's have realism for the last foot."

"Sure," said Jones. "Didn't you hear me say all rights were reserved on the knoll stuff?"

Blushing, half protesting, Ilion put on the gingham gown and big sunbonnet.

"Now, then, Warren," Jones bawled, "just take up the position again, you holding your hand up, pointing at the

sun—you standing beside him, Miss Howard. That's the darby! Now go on with the love stuff. You both sit down. You are looking ahead. Warden, you fold the girl in your arm, then creep up under the sunbonnet and kiss her. Now, then, action—go!"

The fade-out was an admirable success. The substitution would not be noticed. They returned to the hotel and packed their belongings. Harding, who was to accompany Ilion back over the long stretch of highway in her roadster, was seeing off Texas Jones and the cast at the platform station.

"Tex," Harding said, "you think you were alone in shooting double when you got a realistic scrap for our picture, and, incidentally, had the satisfaction of seeing Gleason walloped, but, let me tell you, it wasn't in it with the shooting double I've pulled off."

"I gotcha," said Jones, his sharp, dark eyes twinkling. "I gotcha way back, Warren—way back when you were so anxious about who was to play sweetheart. You put it over in great style. You're sure some bear cat on strategy, Warren."

The train started. "Good-by, Tex," said Harding. "Get them working on 'Gloves and the Girl' at the laboratory, developing and splicing, you know. See you to-morrow."

The sun had just sunk below the line when Harding, at the wheel of the red roadster, Ilion at his side, started their long drive. It was exhilarating. After an hour's driving, the moon came up. The mist had cleared at last. The details on both sides were explained and understood. Late in the night they arrived at her home. Harding kissed her, promised to call the next day for his interview with her father, said good night, and left.

He appreciated her diplomatic aid, for when he called the following day, all primed for a stormy interview, he found Horace Howard most affable,

and, after a frank talk and request, the old gentleman shook hands with him, and said:

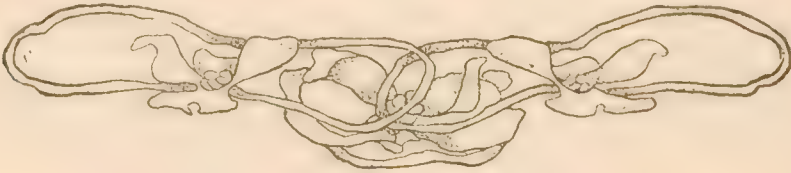
"I consent, young man. I have looked up your record, which stood looking into, something another record I know of couldn't stand."

That night, at a private exhibition, "Gloves and the Girl" was flashed on the screen for the first time. It was a success. Little Jones had lived up to his reputation for positive genius. The tempo, construction, and technique

were perfect. It was a satisfying production to the fade-out.

"I sent out notices to the picture houses that we would probably release it in a few days—at reasonable rates," said Jones, delighted. "We'll start booking it over the circuit to-morrow."

"Right-o," said Harding. "From to-morrow on the Eagle Film Agency takes on more importance." Glancing at Ilion beside him, he concluded: "I can take more interest in my work now."



IN THE STIRRING DAYS OF OLD

By Everett Earle Stanard

O CAPTAIN PROUD, of *The Flyin' Cloud*,
 Was a skipper stanch and bold;
 His hearth and home was the ocean foam,
 And he plied to the coasts of gold.
 He laughed at the gale and crowded sail,
 And rounded the Horn in glee;
 From Maine coast round to the Puget Sound
 He drove his craft through the sea.

He was the skipper of a Cape Horn clipper;
 No ditch the Isthmus spanned;
 The thought of steam was the veriest dream,
 And railroads few in the land.
 At the Sandy Hook aboard he took
 A motley, curious crew;
 And eighty-nine days on the wild sea ways,
 Brought Frisco Bay into view.

But Captain Proud, of *The Flyin' Cloud*,
 In the stirring days of old,
 Made a final trip in his driven ship
 To the shining coasts of gold.
 The engines' throb and the turbines' sob
 Is heard on the ocean ways;
 But the grizzled skipper and the flying clipper
 Are one with the vanished days.

Sequel to "Swiftfoot of the Wild"

For the Sake of the Sweet One



By
J. Allan Dunn

THE Siskiyous are mostly wilderness. Up to his third September, Swiftfoot had never seen nor smelled a man. His education included knowledge of where best to sleep and when, the absolute necessity of always watching his back trail, and where to find the food his appetite most craved. There were many other things born of his individual experiences. Once, going down wind, he had come across a bear that grunted and whirled, half rising to flail at him with a death-dealing paw. But Swiftfoot had leaped high, far higher than ever before, over and across his enemy, and fled down the hill.

Once a fire had swept up the home cañon. With the herd he had bounded up one ridge to find the next ravine in flame. Only the cool decision of the oldest buck of them all had led them across the line of the onrushing devastation, instead of flying before it. So they had found safety in a cañon that

ran at angles to the rest, untouched by the fire. That taught him dread of flame and made the smell of smoke a danger signal.

It was the smoke of a hunter's camp fire, rising above the ridges and drifting on the light morning air, that warned Swiftfoot of impending peril. He had slept on a bare ridge with the bachelors. As the pungent smoke entered his nostrils, he sprang to his feet with the rest of them, six graceful forms gazing around.

There was no sound of crackling undergrowth and snapping boughs, no cloud of smoke; only the faint, insistent trace of something that meant danger. They remained restless for an hour before, reassured by nothing happening, they commenced to browse.

Swiftfoot left them. He had marked the Sweet One on the next ridge the afternoon before. She had gazed at him from the edge of a thicket and led him a merry love chase that he was

forced to abandon at twilight. To-day he would be betimes. He had many ways of courting her now. The crude butting of his callow days was discarded; he wooed with gentle rubbings of his antlers against her sides, and led her to spots where dainties were to be had in seclusion.

As he reached the top of one slope, he found her mounting the opposite one. It seemed almost as if she was on the same errand as his own. Her pliant mood seemed to confirm it. Side by side she trotted with him toward a clearing that he knew of in a wood close to the timber line where the herd did not seem to have strayed. The taint was no longer in the air. The hunters had put out their fire.

The Sweet One looked at her admirer demurely. She had not been lightly won. She had not yet entirely capitulated. But she had made a close survey of the bachelor herd, and the choice of a partner was as much a matter of her decision as of his. Swiftfoot was the handsomest of them all. He was just over three feet at the shoulders, and almost exactly twice that length, the perfection of grace and symmetry, as he loped springily along close to her side. His antlers showed signs of future perfection. In a few years they would attain the length of a third of his body. She did not yet know how he could use them.

At the edge of the wood a young buck, almost a replica of Swiftfoot, trotted out to meet them, prefacing his appearance with a sound best described as a throaty whistle. It was one of the bachelors who, perhaps guessing Swiftfoot's mission, had decided to follow and investigate.

Swiftfoot stopped, throwing up his head and snorting angrily. So did his rival. The Sweet One walked midway between the gallants, looked at them in turn, and quietly stepped to one side. Her move and the expectance of her

attitude were obvious. She had already hesitated between the two, still uncertain which she preferred. This tourney of the wild would settle it. Valor, strength, cleverness were desirable attributes. Now her choice was about to be determined for her. The winner should be hers.

The bucks were nothing loath to abide by such a test. Neither was an expert. It was their first really hostile encounter. They knew and cared nothing for preliminaries, for sparring and side-stepping. Heads on, they rushed, and their antlers clashed together. Had these been more widely branched, they might have sprung apart and interlocked. As it was, each of them was hurled backward, half stunned by the encounter. The Sweet One, who would have been scared at the break of a twig under ordinary conditions, looked on complacently from the shelter of a bush, her head and eyes above it, her eyes filled with a proud emotion of expectancy.

Four times the combatants smashed together, the last time rearing and striking out like boxers. Swiftfoot's down-plunging hoof caught the other on a leg, and he slipped to a kneeling posture, still guarded by his horns. He got up as Swiftfoot retreated for another rush, but limped as he came onward, swerving from the direct attack. Swiftfoot raked him in the flank as they passed, lunging hard at the groin. It threw the other off his balance and out of his stride, and Swiftfoot, wheeling, thrust at him from the rear. The other fell, and in a second Swiftfoot was on top of him, whistling and stamping in fury on his ribs.

The Sweet One ended the combat. It may have been from motives of mercy, or from the desire quickly to confirm the victor. She came into the open, tossed her head, wheeled, and trotted away. Swiftfoot followed. The defeated bachelor, sorely bruised and

humiliated, picked himself up and limped down the hill.

II.

THE Sweet One trotted on, coquettishly bounding ahead whenever Swiftfoot caught up with her, until at last he turned abruptly into a narrow side trail. It led high up across a rocky ridge into a cuplike depression, velvet-turfed, set about with herbage and trees like a park. In its center was a rock-bottomed pool fed by a bubbling spring where wild mint grew. It was a sylvan paradise to which he meant to lead his bride. But he was determined to lead. He had fought for her and won; now it was for her to follow the conqueror. Not without misgivings he kept his pace along the deer path resolutely.

The Sweet One stopped short the instant she noticed her mate's apparent dereliction, and gazed after him in wonderment. She tossed her head and pawed the turf uncertainly. At last she blatted, first impatiently, then in appeal.

Swiftfoot, fifty rods away, heard the cry, and his heart smote him. But his masculine spirit prevailed, and, though he slackened in his trot and set back his big ears to listen, he did not turn his head. Something pattered lightly along the trail behind him, loping to his trot. The narrow trail widened as it left the undergrowth close to the outcrop on the ridge. The Sweet One came up beside him, nuzzling at his neck. He turned and caressed her in turn with his lips, nipping her ever so softly. She had learned her lesson. The protector was henceforth to be the leader.

The afternoon shadows lengthened to dusk and slowly spread to form the web of night. The moon rose at midnight and found them couched together in a covert of sweet fern.

The next morning they were up be-

times, ending their meal with the icy water of the little spring. Just after dawn had gilded the hill crests, they started for the salt lick. Halfway down the slope, the mysterious taint in the air again affected them, the smell of smoke. They halted, sniffing the breeze.

A sound, new to both of them, a hollow howling that echoed among the hills, came rolling up to Swiftfoot and the Sweet One. Nearer and nearer it came, a baying that grew ever more triumphant and assured as it became plainer. It died away between the ridges and rose as it mounted the crests, echoing from the hills. Strange as it was, it struck terror to both of them. Memory, born in their instincts of their forbears, warned them of the approach of peril. It was the hunting cry of a hound, hot on the trail. The ominous noise came up the hill toward them. As they stood with far-planted legs, uplifted ears, and staring eyes, they heard the sound of a heavy body crashing through the undergrowth.

Trembling violently, they gathered themselves together. Through the trees rushed a white body, saddled and splotted with brown, nose to the ground, tongue lolling, ears pendent, occasionally throwing up its head to utter the fearsome sound that started with a howl and ended in the deep note of a bell.

For a few seconds they stared, their heads above a heavy growth of manzanita. Then the spell of fear was broken. Away! Away they bounded, circling the mountain through the trees, the unknown, dreaded beast in pursuit. Crazed with terror, the Sweet One broke from Swiftfoot's side, and, before he realized her desertion, was gone at a tangent over the crest of the hill. The hound followed directly in his trail, unheeding the doe. The dog had caught sight of Swiftfoot's spiked antlers and was not to be shaken off.

Swiftfoot, his head carried far back, leaped out of the live timber, and crossed a barren to where charred trees and firefalls marked the line of the last conflagration.

There was a flash from down the hill, a report, something that whistled by him and lent him speed that he sorely needed. The man, berating himself for not having held far enough ahead, fired again.

Something seared Swiftfoot's neck in front. Half, a quarter of an inch farther back, and the bullet would have severed the windpipe. He raced on, almost blown by the tremendous pace, his heart pounding, tears of fright in his eyes.

The man swore again as the buck dodged in behind the burned timber. Another shot rang out from the other side of the hill. "That's Joe," he said to himself. "I bet he's got one. And he'll likely get a chance at this."

He roared abuse at the dog that had obediently driven the buck from cover and given him his chance to shoot, and vainly tried to whistle it back, blaming everything but his own inability to hit a running target.

Swiftfoot was in sore straits. At a slower pace he could still have headed the dog and kept his wind, though he might have given a too easy shot for the man in ambush. But now the blood pumped from his heart by his frantic bounds was congesting in his veins. The burned trees swam before him as he leaped; his legs grew weaker at every spring; his lungs seemed bursting. And behind him the dog bayed closer.

III.

YET, at the last, instinct had saved Swiftfoot. The treacherous firefalls over which he leaped with unerring judgment, despite his growing weakness, offered the acme of difficulty to the hound. The trunks were recently

charred, and the ground between lay deep in ashes. As the dog scrambled and clawed his way the fine dust choked him and stung his eyes to fiery watering. It filled his throat and coated his tongue and rose before him in fine clouds. He lost sight of the bounding Swiftfoot and struggled in a labyrinth of crisscross trunks, some of which crumbled beneath his weight. Scent was impossible; his nostrils were filled with the smothering motes. He slid and slipped, jumped and hung and fell as he fought his way.

Racing across a pine pole, the dog felt it break under him. He dropped into a pit between a jumble of trees and tried in vain to climb out of the fog of fine ash particles. Baffled, exhausted, he sat upon his haunches and changed his tune. The bay of hunting turned to a howl of distress that brought the man at last to free him.

Still speeding with spasmodic, automatic leaps, Swiftfoot cleared the burned timber and emerged into a slope of bronzed bracken. His breath came in gulps, his sides rose and fell like bellows, he could go no farther and turned at bay just as the hound changed to the call for help.

There is a volapük of the wild. The sounds that came to Swiftfoot were plainly those of distress. The pursuit was over.

He stood with widespread feet, his head hanging. Gradually his panic subsided, and his tortured lungs and heart attained their normal condition. Now he thought of the Sweet One. With every function centered in capacity for flight, his brain had lacked the blood for a memory impulse. The shot from the other side of the hill was registered in his brain cells, and, not knowing man's self-made regulations, he feared that a whistling thing like the one he knew was a missile of destruction might have reached the doe.

The ferns clothed the slight slopes

of a dell that drained down to a tiny spring. He lapped the contents of the little pool and waited till it filled again and again before his parched throat was at ease.

His limbs cried for a rest in the fern, but his spirit called out for the mate he had so newly won. And slowly, stiffly, he trotted on.

There was a notch in the summit of the next ridge. It was an ancient run-way, the trail worn out of the stone by the passage of countless animals that had for centuries passed that way. From the top the ground sloped smartly downward, barren rock for perhaps a hundred feet to where the thick timber commenced. From his point of vantage Swiftfoot looked over the trees upon a tumbling confusion of hill crests. He stood upon the watershed of the range, the highest point in Sis-kiyou County.

Somewhere, unless the second shot that he had heard had compassed her destruction, the Sweet One was seeking through the wilderness that lay before him, trying to rejoin him. The air brought him no clew of her location. This side of the range was unknown land to Swiftfoot, who knew intimately every rod of his own domain that could be traveled with safety and advantage. But he would have braved far more hostile outlooks to satisfy his desire to find the Sweet One, and he started into the cañon ahead of him. The wind blew uphill, a friendly aid to his senses, and he pressed on as swiftly as his condition permitted.

The wind warned him just as he was about to enter a clearing. It carried an odor that was disagreeable. It was new to him, and it meant danger. Straight down the wind it came, and his eyes followed up the trail. The clearing was some thirty yards across. As his gaze focused itself on the red patch that moved opposite, it became steady between two saplings. There was a move-

ment like the waving of branches, only they, too, were red, and something flashed dully in the sunshine. The vivid color, brilliant as the blossoms of the Painter's Brush beneath his feet, fascinated him. He was standing broadside to a densely leaved bush of chamisal, his neck set at right angles, his head held high.

Across the clearing, the hunter, scarlet-jerseyed for his own protection, steadied his rifle until the hindsight dropped truly in the notch at the end of the barrel. He had killed one deer that afternoon, and was now on his way to camp to bring up a pony and pack it in. Two made up the limit of his licensed bag. This was the last day of his vacation, and the luck that had been against him for two weeks had suddenly changed. His forefinger remained motionless on his trigger while he tried to decide whether the buck was standing in line with the direction of his head, or, if not, if the body was to the left or right. It was impossible to tell through the heavy screen of the brush.

Fate decided for Swiftfoot and against the hunter. The man fired at where he guessed the buck's shoulder was placed and missed the target completely. Swiftfoot heard the song of the bullet, its *zip!* as it cut through the foliage; he saw the blaze spurt from the rifle even as he bounded from his shelter and once more fled headlong.

The hunter did not swear at his miss like his comrade beyond the ridge. Instead, he cheerily prevaricated to himself. "Only a yearling. I'm glad I missed it, after all. I don't want to be called a spike hunter."

IV.

WITH his heart sounding an alarm and the sense of suffocation that comes from overburdened lungs, Swiftfoot bounded along, fear in his saddle, urging him to ever greater effort. The

quiet woods that had so long provided him with shelter and food seemed to have turned traitor. Danger lurked in the shadows, and he no longer trusted his most faithful sentinels, his senses.

As he raced headlong, he came upon a sight that halted him almost as abruptly as if the hunter's bullet had actually entered his heart. The sweat that had already begun to stain his coat in dark patches broke out freely. His limbs shook, slaver dripped from his jaws, and his eyes projected from their sockets at the horrible object.

The smell that rouses to frenzy all flesh-eating animals and paralyzes with fright and faintness all the milder tribes seemed to penetrate to his brain—the odor of freshly spilled blood. There swung the carcass of a deer, suspended from a slim aspen bent over by the weight and resting in the crotch of a sturdier tree. The body had been slit open and the head hung low from the gaping throat that still dripped scarlet.

In an agony of dread that fought with a desperate determination to make certain his loss, Swiftfoot placed one faltering foot before the other and forced himself nearer. Then his heart bounded; the faintness that possessed him passed in the glad reaction. He had caught sight of the drooping antlers. It was not the Sweet One! He wheeled and went pounding uphill. The man was below him, and until he was sure the dread presence had gone he postponed his search for the Sweet One, hoping that she would come back to their haunts of her own accord.

But the weeks sped and the time of berries supplanted the time of flowers and the Sweet One came not, though Swiftfoot sought her day after day, roaming ridge and cañon in his faithful exploration. He left the herd and fed and slept alone. The mild California winter came and passed, and with the return of spring, the new tips to the evergreens, and the resurrection

of the sweetest herbs, the pain that had become only a dull ache throbbed once more insistently. He thought only of the Sweet One. His antlers' spikes had dropped away, to his great alarm, and been replaced with moss-covered projections that forked like a branch and grew daily more tender with increasing size. He wanted to display them to his mate. Something within him refused to believe her utterly lost.

Forsaking entirely the range, he started out one spring morning, determined to continue in the direction which he believed she had taken until he found her. So far he had always limited his excursions to the nigh side of a swift stream beyond which the land lay gray and bare of vegetation, rolling in mounds of pumice streaked with lava dikes. What lay beyond he could not imagine. To him it seemed the end of the world, a place of desolation not intended for living creatures. Now the urge that dominated him spurred him beyond the stream to attempt the journey of the desert where his hoofs clicked loudly on the flinty surface, and his shadow, distorted by the uneven slag of a long-dead volcano, was his only company.

He had started at dawn. Three hours later the sun beat fiercely down upon him, sweat-stained and parched, his swollen tongue hanging from his jaws, his blood hot and sluggish under the double glare of the sun and its reflection. Usually at this time he was in the shelter of the forest. Before him a high wave of lava lifted. He sighed and braced himself to surmount it, the duplicate of twenty others crossed in the last two hours, only to reveal still more ahead. It seemed impossible that any animal, even terror-stricken, would have fled this far across a desert where nothing grew and not even snakes made a home. But the toil of the trip behind him held present terrors that forbade return, and he topped the flinty ridge.

Before him lay another stretch of volcanic waste, but beyond that gleamed the welcome green of trees clothing hill after hill to far, blue distances. A human being would have failed to notice a breath of wind, but Swiftfoot caught the welcome scent of water. It was a long way off, but its promise annihilated distance. In less than an hour he clattered through shingle and plunged his dry muzzle gratefully in the limpid water, wading in presently to let it lave his weary, burning fetlocks. Finally he crossed the trout stream toward more solid food.

Three forms moved amid the trees. Two of them were spotted as if splashed with sunshine filtered through the boughs. These ran to the third and larger presence, and all three stood gazing at him. Swiftfoot's heart began to thump. His hopes had blossomed in a miracle. Slowly the doe advanced, stopped to gaze, and came on again, the fawns prancing about her on stilted legs.

It was the Sweet One and her children! *Their* children—his and hers!

V.

SWIFTFOOT sounded his whistling love call, and she answered, bounding to meet him. Suddenly she stopped as if arrested by some hidden power and blatted. Swiftfoot rushed on, heeding nothing but the glad sight of his mate.

Something struck him breast high and rebounded, striking him smartly as he continued to advance. It seemed to be a vine stretching between stumps of trees, a vine set with sharp thorns. He trotted along the line fence, newly built by a rancher who had taken up a cattle range, seeking in vain to find an opening. The Sweet One kept parallel with him on the other side of the barbed wire, the fawns, big-eyed, gazing askance at their sire, trailing her.

Time after time he tested the fence, snorting his indignation at this final obstacle between him and his love while she made little throaty noises of endearment that raised his pride and longing to the topmost pitch. He had never seen a fence before. He could hardly see this one. Above his neck there seemed no obstacle. He stretched across, and the Sweet One raised her muzzle to his and caressed him with her tongue.

Swiftfoot backed up. Somehow he scented a trap, a hedging of his liberties once he crossed the barrier. Yet, once passed, it could be crossed again. And beyond it was his heart's desire!

He snorted as he surveyed the clear run ahead of him. The top wire was invisible, but he had gauged its height. It had been pricked into him by the barbs. A dozen lengthening leaps culminated in one magnificent bound, head back, his legs tucked up beneath him. High above the fence he sailed, and landed springily, bounding on with the impetus of the jump into the trees. The Sweet One joined him. Behind them the two fawns skipped, and the friendly forest took them to its heart.

Once Bitten

A PROUD mother took her son, aged six years, to be photographed. When they arrived at the studio, the child suddenly began to cry uproariously.

It was impossible to calm him or to keep him in the chair. For half an hour he filled the place with his howls and yells, running wildly about the room.

"But, Bobby," said his mother, "the man isn't going to hurt you. Just smile and keep still a moment, and it will be all over before you know it."

"Yes," returned the youngster, amid his tears. "Yes, I know. That's what you told me at the dentist's."



A Fool for Luck

By Hubert La Due



SUPPOSE you're one of the folks who are hailing "Ivory" Shultz as the hero of the world's series. The lucky beggar! His name and picture in every paper in the country; and all because he poled out that fluke home run in the tenth inning.

No one seems to remember the freak throw that he made in the third. If it hadn't been for that, there wouldn't have been any need for a grand-stand circuit swat to pull the game out of the fire.

But then I might know it. He was born with a rabbit's foot in one hand and a horseshoe in the other. He never had an intelligent thought in his life, yet he manages to blunder out of every tight place he gets into, and to fall square in the center of a patch of four-leaf clover.

You think I'm talking this way because I'm the fellow off whom Shultz made that homer, don't you? Well, you're wrong. That was nothing—a mere trifle compared to some of the stunts he has pulled. I ought to know. Where do you think he got the name of "Ivory?" From me. I gave it to

him long ago, when we were both freshmen at Claremont College.

The first time that Shultz plopped into the limelight was during the football season, when he showed up in an old suit and announced that he was a candidate for a half-back position. We all laughed, for we had two corking good halves—including myself—and a couple of whirlwind substitutes. But we told him to go ahead and try; and what happened? Inside of a month one of the subs came down with measles; the other quit college; and the day before our big game, I side-stepped into a four-inch rut and sprained my ankle. I had to sit on the side lines and watch Shultz play my position.

Three times that day he threw away the game by bonehead plays, and each time the coach wasn't looking. Then, in the last ten minutes of play, he grabbed a fumble in the open field and ran it over for a touchdown. We won the game, and Shultz copped my berth.

When the baseball season came around, and I made the varsity nine as a pitcher, the ivory-headed goof had to land on me for two doubles and a

home run in the first practice game of the year. It was curtains for yours truly. They took him off the second squad and gave him an outfield job; and I'll bet that no man at Claremont ever made more errors that didn't get into the box scores.

If he did make one that they couldn't overlook, it came when nobody was on base. But they would have pardoned anything he did, anyhow, because of his stickwork. Let old Ivory come to bat in a pinch, and there was nothing to it. He always managed to connect safely when a hit was needed; or, if he didn't, somebody would fumble the ball and let him make his base, anyway.

Naturally I didn't have any love for Shultz; but circumstances developed later that forced us to be friends. It was all brought about by Aileen and Ellen. They were two sisters who lived near the college. Aileen wasn't much to look at. She was too plump and—well, I didn't like her a little bit; but Shultz, who didn't know much about the gentle sex, couldn't see anybody else. This didn't make me feel bad for a minute, because little Ellen was just the sort of girl I wanted to see some day sitting opposite me at the breakfast table. She was as pretty as one of these magazine-cover lassies, and had a way about her that made a fellow feel like lying down and letting her walk over him.

Going, as we did, to visit the two sisters two or three times each week, Shultz and I had to set aside our differences and be friends. Before long I began to feel that I had wronged him. I decided that he wasn't such a bad fellow, after all. Perhaps it was because I felt sorry for him. He was lost when it came to parlor talk. He would sit around, looking confused and foolish, and not say a dozen words during the course of an hour. When he did

talk, the chances were that he would make some break that would cause him to turn red and everybody present to break out laughing.

But courting the fair sex took more money than either Shultz or I could afford. It got to the point where we were perpetually broke, and generally in debt. So when an opportunity came along to play semipro ball on Sundays, and thus pick up a few odd dollars, we jumped at the chance.

There was a strict rule at Claremont against students playing professional ball, and we kept pretty quiet about it, playing under assumed names and giving fake excuses when we had to leave town over the week-end.

Then one afternoon both of us received a notice to visit the president's office. When we reported, he flashed a telegram in our faces and asked us what it meant. The telegram was one that Shultz had received from the manager of a bush team in a town near by, asking us to show up on the following Sunday. Shultz had forgotten and left it in a book he had borrowed from one of the professors.

There was no chance for us to explain. Our presence, said the president, was undesirable. He had the goods on us, so we didn't try to argue.

That night we talked it all over. Finally we decided that the best thing to do was to start out to buck the world. Shultz said that an old friend of his father's who had a law office in Houston had urged him many times to work for him and study that business. He had no doubt that after things were explained, Sheridan—that was the friend's name—could find something for me to do also. It seemed to be the only way out of a bad situation, so I agreed to go with him. We dropped a note to Aileen and Ellen, giving some reason for our sudden departure, and boarded the train.

II.

SHERIDAN proved to be a good fellow. He said that he had been looking for some new blood for his office, and that we would be worth a lot to him. We found a boarding place, and went to work with the intention of showing old Knowlton, the college prexy, that we had better stuff in us than he imagined.

For six months matters went along swimmingly. Then the Briggs case came up. Briggs was a young cashier who had been laboring under the impression that he could play faro with his firm's money and get away with it. When the bottom dropped out from under him, the poor fellow woke up with a start. He had plenty of friends, however, and they clubbed together and hired Sheridan to defend him. The case meant more than money to Sheridan; the advertising that would come from winning it would go a long way toward strengthening his legal reputation.

I'll never forget the first day of that trial. It was one of those warm, moist, sticky, Texas days that make one feel like a limp rag. For several hours we sat in a crowded courtroom. Things were working for us as smoothly as Chance's old infield. We felt sure of an acquittal.

When the judge finally adjourned court for the day, Shultz and I, with a couple of friends, made a bee line for the nearest soda fountain. We had a couple of cool drinks, and presently others joined our party. I noticed, after a while, that Shultz was getting rather talkative. At last the talk turned to the Briggs case.

"Looks pretty tough for the prosecution," remarked one of the newcomers, "but I guess the district attorney is wise enough to beat a man like Sheridan at any old law game that might come up."

"Don't you think it for a minute!" exclaimed Shultz, rising in his seat. "Sheridan is the wisest lawyer in the State of Texas. Who else would have thought to get hold of the company's cash book and keep it hid? And how is Mr. District Attorney going to prove his case unless he can find it? How is he, I ask you?"

Everybody laughed. I felt a cold shiver running up my spinal cord. I started to interrupt, but Shultz turned on me and said: "Quit kicking my shins when I'm trying to converse with friends."

Our goose was done to a brown. Early the next morning the sheriff dropped around to our office with a search warrant and a subpoena for that cash book. It seemed that the fellow to whom Shultz had given the tip was a deputy in the district attorney's office. Sheridan not only lost the case, but he was fortunate to escape arrest for compounding a felony.

Of course Shultz and I parted company from the pay roll then and there.

"Good-by, you poor boobs," growled Sheridan, after he had slipped us the pleasing information. "I hope somebody shoots you before you do any more damage. You are public nuisances, running around loose the way you are."

When we got back to our room, I threw Shultz down onto the floor and sat on him. I believe I would have killed him if I hadn't stopped to think that he had twenty dollars in the savings bank. I needed part of that twenty; I was broke. So I let him off with a few punches, and then asked him to sit down and talk over matters like a regular human being.

That was about all we did do—talk. We found that our friends in Houston, after that, could be numbered on the fingers of an armless man. Two weeks later we were down to our last quarter. We were arguing as to whether

it would be better to spend it for coffee and sinkers, or to buy a couple of boxes of crackers to eat in our room, when a bright idea flashed into Shultz's mind.

"Mac," he shouted, "why can't we play baseball? You remember we used to pick up a few odd shekels at that game. If I do say so, we had the class; and there's no reason why we can't do it again. There must be some ball teams in this neck of the woods that would take a chance on us."

It was a happy thought. Immediately we went out to hunt for managers. The only one in Houston knew us, and gave us the icy laugh. He said, however, that he had an acquaintance over at Fairmont, a little town near by, against whom he had a grudge, and that it might be worth while looking him up.

We trudged thirty miles to Fairmont. Sure enough, there was a ball club in that town called the Eagles. The manager's name was Foxhall. He said that he was having a hard time to find recruits at the salary he wanted to pay.

"If you want to work for forty a month," said Foxhall, "I can use whichever one of you is an outfielder." That was Shultz, of course, the lucky beggar!

But matters didn't turn out so badly for me, after all. There was another club in the next town—the Hawkeyes—that was in the market for a cheap pitcher. Shultz tipped me off to it after he had been training with the Eagles for a few days. I went over to have a talk with the manager, and hooked up with him for ten dollars a month more than Shultz was getting. I felt pretty cheery about it.

After glancing over the crowd of misfits I was to play with, I figured that I was certainly going to make a hit with the natives in that part of the country. I worked hard to get into condition, and then I began to show them that I was a bright and shining star. If I do say so, I always could

pitch, and I was going as well then as I ever have gone.

The Eagles and the Hawkeyes belonged to the Cotton Belt League. I don't suppose you ever heard of it; most people haven't. But occasionally the scouts from the big brush come gumshoeing down there, hoping to spot another Alexander or a young Ty Cobb. If a man bats five hundred and fields nine-ninety in the Cotton Belt, the scouts figure that with training they might be able to make a fair ball player out of him for the major circuits.

Shultz and I were the sensations of the year. I was working like a rapid-fire gun with a range finder and disappearing carriage, and Ivory was poling out his usual crop of triples and two-baggers. As a matter of fact, about the only time I ever got into trouble was when the Hawkeyes played the Eagles. Shultz was a boox to me. He knew my delivery like a book and landed on everything I forked over the platter.

III.

ALONG toward the middle of the season, when I had a string of fifteen consecutive wins to my credit, the manager of the Hawkeyes tipped me off to the fact that there was a scout from the Boston Highbinders in the offing, and that it looked as if I were going to get a chance in the big time.

"He's seen you work once," said the manager, "and he was favorably impressed. If you can repeat in the game to-morrow against the Eagles, it means the big league for you and a couple of thousand purchase money for me. Whatever you do, don't get overanxious and blow up."

"The only man on the Eagles' lineup whose number I haven't got is Ivory Shultz," I assured him, "and you needn't worry about him. Shultz and I are old pals. I'm going to have a little talk with him to-night."

When I laid the proposition before Shultz, he saw right away how fair it was, and agreed that it would be a shame to ruin my chances.

"Leave it to me," he said, shaking my hand. "You've stood for a lot of foolishness, and now I'm going to make it all up to you. If I make a clean hit off you to-morrow, you can have my right eye for a marble."

I slept that night with an easy mind. The next afternoon I stepped onto the rubber and proceeded to show Mr. Highbinder Scout what I had—and it was plenty. There wasn't anything I couldn't do with the old onion that day.

But in the fifth inning, when Shultz came up the second time, I had a wab-bly streak and issued him a pass. After he got onto the bags, Shultz didn't consider that he would do me any harm by showing the crowd a little classy base running. He stole second and third in succession, and then started for home while I held the ball in my hand.

I had a brain storm right then. He was almost to the plate before I let loose with the ball. It was a wild throw, and in reaching for it, Mike Dorgan, the catcher, put his hand in front of Shultz's spikes and had it beautifully ripped. Nothing serious, but it had an awful effect on Mike's temper. He lit into me something scandalous, and then turned on Shultz and gave him his pedigree in choice, bush-league language. I expected a riot then and there, but Shultz kept his bearings and walked back to the bench without a word.

Along about the eighth inning, the one run that Shultz had made began to look as big as a mountain. While I was pitching air-tight ball, the fellows behind me couldn't put over a tally. The strain began to tell. I like to be staked to a lead of one run, anyway.

In the first of the eighth I gave an-

other walk. The next man up was Shultz, so I felt better about it. He gave me a reassuring wink as he took his position. I eased up and put a floater dead through the center of the plate. Shultz didn't take his bat off his shoulder.

"Wow!" yelled Mike Dorgan, as he threw back the ball. "The Dutchman's yellow! That's why he can run so well."

My heart sank. I had seen Shultz nearly kill a man once for calling him yellow. I didn't take any chances with the next one. It cut the corner of the plate. Shultz made a feeble swing and missed it four inches. I felt better. But just as I wound up for the next one, Mike let loose again.

"Yellow!" he giped. "You've got a streak as wide as a country road. Afraid of the fast ones, are you? Or are you waiting for another walk? You won't get it; and if you do, you'll be spiked at every bag. You're yellow, and your whole family's yellow!"

"I'll show you who's yellow!" howled Shultz, grabbing his bat so tightly that I could see the veins bulge out on his wrists.

I tried to stop that throw, but it was too late. It was a high, jumpy inshoot. Shultz stepped up to it and knocked the old pill about two miles beyond the outfield.

The gravy was spilled. Shultz had broken up the game. I lost my nerve entirely, issued three walks, and allowed four hits before a relief pitcher was sent in. What the manager said to me is a bitter memory.

When I was leaving the grounds, Shultz came up to me and tried to apologize.

"Honest, Mac," he wailed, "I got rattled. I was so sore I forgot everything in the world."

"Keep away from me; I'm dangerous!" I replied, without stopping. "I'm

through with you for life. You've ruined me."

I tramped on, leaving him on the verge of tears. At that, I almost felt sorry for the poor bonehead; but the manager's words were still too fresh in my mind to allow me to feel very sorry for anybody but myself.

I couldn't sleep that night. There was some sort of tank-circuit show in town, and I bought a ticket. After the first act, I left in disgust and wandered about the town.

Then I met Shultz. It was pitiable the way he went on. He said if I wouldn't forgive him he was going to end it all. I was about to relent and assure him of my undying friendship when a stranger walked up to where we were standing. He slapped Shultz on the shoulder.

"Why so gloomy, old-timer?" he inquired.

"What do you expect?" retorted Shultz angrily. "Do you suppose after I went and knocked my old friend out of the box this afternoon that I'm in a happy frame of mind?"

The stranger burst out in a loud guffaw of laughter. He was a fat chap, with a large bay window, and I thought he was going to burst.

"My friend," he said, when he had got himself under control, "do you know who I am? I'm a scout for the Highbinders. If I were you, I wouldn't take things so hard. After seeing your little exhibition this afternoon and looking over your record, I am sure strong for you. You'll go great among sympathetic company. Just sign this document, and to-morrow we'll start for the Hub City."

IV.

THAT'S how Shultz got into the big league—over my prostrate body, as usual. He didn't stay with the Highbinders very long. The first time they used him he pulled a couple of plays

so raw that he was taken out and kept on the bench the rest of the game. They asked waivers on him right away. It began to look as if Ivory Shultz was to come down a blamed sight faster than he went up. But not him!

That same week, O'Brien, the only decent outfielder on the Bees' line-up, had to break his leg. They bought Shultz to fill the place until they could find a real ball player. What does he do? Steps into the first game and rings up three doubles and a single and cinched the job. And while I was reading about it in the papers and wondering why he couldn't have done the same when he was with the Highbinders, I found out the reason. The Bees caught the Highbinders in a slump on the home stretch, and there was old Ivory Shultz in a world's series.

Meanwhile, I remained pottering around in the Cotton Belt, until one day, toward the last of the season, a scout from the Benedicts took a fancy to my pitching and ordered me to report the following March.

I felt pretty good over it; sat right down and wrote Ellen all about my luck, and hinted rather strongly that as soon as I collected some real big-league money it would be nice to have a wife sitting in the grand stand rooting for me every day. Then I bought a ticket for Boston, where I intended to winter, waiting for the next season to open.

The first person I met at the hotel in the Hub City was Ivory Shultz. He looked unusually prosperous, and showed me a check of four figures which had been handed to him as his share of the world's series' plunder.

"What are you going to do with all that money?" I inquired. "It's more than you ever had before in your life."

"Oh, I don't know," he replied airily. "There's a little girl who would be pleased to death to help spend it. I've

been writing to Aileen lately, and I like the tone of her letters. I'm going over now to send her a telegram bearing the fatal words."

"Shake hands!" I exclaimed. "You'll make a good brother-in-law. I'm going to pop the question to Ellen as soon as I get to going right."

"Fine!" said Shultz. "I'll see you later and let you know the news."

Two hours later, Shultz found me in the lobby. He held a telegram in his hand. With a sheepish grin, he passed it over to me. And what do you think? It read: "Am overjoyed. Start to-day for Boston. Have always loved you, but didn't think you cared for me."

And the blamed thing was signed: "Ellen!"

"What's all this mean?" I exclaimed, looking up in amazement.

"Heaven help me, Mac, I made a mistake," answered Shultz dejectedly. "I was thinking about you and Ellen when I wrote my telegram, and I mixed the names!"

And, knowing Shultz as I did, I had to believe him.

Sure, he married her. What's a man going to do when a pretty girl is in love with him? They have a youngster now, and they're the happiest couple I ever knew. They ought to be—he with the best girl that ever lived for a wife, and she with a husband that's a world series' hero. That chap can't help being lucky!

Animal Swimmers

NEARLY all animals are good swimmers, and take to the water naturally. Many stories are told of the feats of rhinoceros, elk, and deer; but of all swimmers in all climes, the best, although not the swiftest, is the polar bear, who passes half its time in the water, swimming and diving.

The bear's swimming power is wonderful, and it must be remembered that

the water in some of its regions is invariably cold, and that cold water is ordinarily very discouraging to a swimmer. There are bears that can swim thirty miles or more without a special effort.

One of the swiftest of swimming animals is the squirrel. A sportsman on one occasion, having a young squirrel that had never seen water, wanted to see if it could swim, and took it with him in a rowboat to the center of the lake.

When the squirrel was put in the water, it turned toward the bank, head and paws above the water, back and tail underneath it, and began to swim so rapidly that the man had hard work to recover it when it reached the shallow water near the land.

THE OLD TOWN CLOCK

By Jo Lemon

I SLOWLY tick the time away
And strike the hour with measured beat,
Serenely looking down upon
The Green, from up the village street.

Perched high above so all can see,
Twice over threescore years and ten,
Year in year out the seasons round
I've counted off the hours of men.

My big, round face, with mismatched hands
That crawl forever on and on
Dividing up eternity,
Keeps watch o'er all from dawn to dawn.

A sentinel of Father Time
I stand and warn the passer-by,
Adrift upon the endless stream
Of years, that coming, go for aye.

But few are they who heed my knell
That marks the passing of their span;
Too late they turn to stem the tide
And strive the drifting hulk to man.

Then hearken to the old town clock—
When putting out to meet your fate,
Take warning, all ye foolish ones,
Be sure ye do not start too late.

MOTHER BLUNDERBUSS

By HERMAN H. MATTESON



THE Apostle, impaling a scorched pancake upon his fork, thrust it truculently toward the boarding-house mistress who had just emerged from the kitchen bearing an enormous platter of bacon and eggs.

"Ain't there been a mistake, Mother?" demanded he facetiously, waving the cake. "This here belongs down to the machine shop, for engine gaskets. If a mud shark bit into this, he'd have to see a dentist."

Mother deposited the platter upon the table, yanked the pancake from the Apostle's fork.

"It's burned; any fool can see that." She stabbed her thumb suggestively toward the bacon and eggs. "Tie into them—and let 'em stop your mouth."

"It ain't as if you cooked 'em, Mother," added Apostle apologetically. "There never was any kick on your personal cookin'. Now, was there?"

Seven fishermen and two scowmen, suspending masticatory operations in varying degrees of open-mouthedness, shook their heads in emphatic negation.

"But that party in the kitchen, there,

can't cook. He'd ought to be workin' in the glue factory. We want him fired."

Mother squared about suddenly.

"I do the hirin'—likewise the firin'. I can't see as you've fell off any, Apostle, or you, Sawlog, or you, either, Big-paw Cinnamon—all hog fat."

A furtive, wizened, red face appeared in the kitchen doorway, but bobbed from sight suddenly as the Apostle began to fence excitedly in that direction with his table knife, punctuating each scathing citation with a vicious jab.

"He can't cook. He's dirty. He's a liar and sneak—and thief. We want him fired. We demands it."

Mother rested her clenched hands upon her hips, thrust her head bellikingly forward.

"Fire that sick, wretched boy? You ain't got no more heart than cannibals. I ain't going to fire him—leastways, not till he's well and strong. What would become of him? Why, the day he first come here, and him half cryin', I seen he needed a hand. 'I'm broke,' he says to me, 'pocket, heart, and spirit. I can't fish; I ain't strong enough to haul a net or heave on a

capstan.' Then he goes on to tell, Cherry does, how he'd tried to enlist in the army, but the principal general comes to him and taps him on the wish-bone and says that his chest is too narrow to pin medals onto. 'Never mind,' I says; 'there's work for light, and there's work for heavy. What can you do?' 'I can cook,' says he. 'You're hired,' says I. Maybe, now, his cookin' ain't improvin' much, but he is; he's gettin' weller and stronger every day."

"But, Mother," whiningly expostulated the Apostle, "think of us. This ain't no foundling asylum."

"No, it ain't; it's a home for the feeble-minded."

Bigpaw Cinnamon's bellow signaled the scraping back of chairs. The men clattered nosily out of the room, and Mother, with martial tread, deployed into the kitchen.

"Drat you, Cherry, them cakes was burned again. What in the nation do——"

Cherry began to stammer, then rounded his eyes in simulated surprise.

"Was them cakes burned? Why, can that be? I was writin' a letter. I must of kind of forgot 'em."

"Writin' a letter—at mealtime?"

A fold of white paper protruded from Cherry's open pocket. With a single adroit gesture, Mother secured the screed, held it high above her head as the diminutive cook strove frantically to recover it.

"Now I am goin' to read it," said Mother doggedly, "seein' as you're so all-fired anxious I shouldn't."

She moved to the window, opened the sheet.

DEAR LOBSCOUSE: Pretty soft for me, I guess. I got a job cooking. Get that—me, cooking! This is a fisherman's boarding house run by Mother Blunderbuss what they call her because she's deadly at close range. But at that she's easy; she'll fall for any hard-luck story. So come on over long as you ain't got a job. I guarantee a flop and chow for the rest of the winter. You come

to the door of the back porch of the white house by the scow yard if you come in on the night packet, and I'll let you in. I'll frame a tale of woe that will get by with the cannoneer. Yours for pure food,

CHERRY GUNTHER.

II.

IN a rather purposeless but exceedingly noisy manner, the cook was clattering the pans and pots about upon the stove. Mother's broad hand fell heavily upon his puny shoulder.

"Cannoneer, hey? I fall for any hard-luck story? Well, my huckleberry, you caper into your room and pack your duds, or you'll fall for something! Cannoneer! To think, all these weeks I've kept them savages offen your back. I'd ought to have throwed you to 'em. Cannoneer!"

"Lobscouse has been sick, too," explained Cherry weakly. "I and him worked for a spell on the halibut banks together. We was wet and cold, begun to cough, and got kind of fever spells along toward evening. The cap seen we was sick and fired us. I'm here and gettin' better, but Lob ain't got a job, and him sleeping in a tent near the Friday Harbor cannery, is getting worse and coughing again. I thought he'd be awful handy around here, chopping wood and maybe aidin' me to cook, and—and I thought he could sleep with me."

The packet boat whistled shrilly for the landing. Presently the churn of her reversed propeller, the creak of bending piles told that she had made fast. Still Mother Blunderbuss stood with the open letter in her hand. Cherry took a final poke at an up-turned kettle, cast aside his apron, sighed abysmally, moved slowly toward the little lean-to room that had been his.

Mother thrust the letter toward him.

"Hurry, you mudhead, if you're goin' to mail this."

"Mail it! Ain't I fired?"

"If the boy is sick—sleepin' in a

damp tent—coughin' again. Well, move, you dratted numskull! That boat ain't goin' to be here all winter. Here's a stamp. Hurry!"

III.

SILENCE portentous pervaded the dining room during the midday meal. The Apostle argued no abstruse theology! Sawlog Stevens refrained from recitals of youthful, pristine prowess that had been his in the days when he had been a lumberjack; Bigpaw Cinnamon and all the rest kept their gaze fastened upon the food with an intentness which even the shortcomings of Cherry, the cook, scarcely warranted. When Mother brought in the pie, the Apostle lifted his head and motioned to her to close the kitchen door.

"Mother," he began ceremoniously, "we've et with you, most of us, now, goin' on to five years."

"And no man ever went hungry," amended Mother.

But the Apostle was not thus to be placated. Shaking a ponderous fist in the direction of the kitchen, his lips began to move and finally formed themselves for explosive speech.

"He's got to go. He ain't no good. He's ruining us all, every man jack of us. We won't stand it no more."

Mother stiffened, but the Apostle went on:

"Money has been missed from the bunk house. Some one has put the fish commissioner onto some of the boys for takin' a salmon after sundown. That ain't the worst; our systems is goin' to rack under his cookin', so to call it. I seen him pick his teeth with the big fork, then with that same fork stab out a hunk of beef for Bigpaw, there. We won't—it ain't in human nature—you just gotta can him, or—or we will."

Mother had been tracing crosses and crisscrosses upon the Turkey-red table-

cloth with her thumb nail, but at mention of Cherry's flagrant infraction of kitchen ethics she flung herself back in her chair with a snort:

"Apostle, that won't never, never happen again—never!"

The Apostle bestowed a sly but triumphant wink upon Bigpaw Cinnamon, but Mother was fully aware of the fisherman's wigwagging.

"You say he done it, Apostle. All right; let it go at that. It won't happen no more. As to firin' him out—I canned a boy once, my own boy Davey, when he wasn't but thirteen year old. Davey had just come home from Sunday school. He wanted to go swimmin'. 'No,' I says, 'not on Sunday.' Davey flew mad, bellered, then pouted. I never paid no attention, but kept on putterin' about the house. Maybe after a hour I come into the settin' room. There was a sight to give a body the fantods. Davey had took the blue plush photygraft album offen my marble-top center table, and had tied our old tomcat, Belshazzar, onto it with strings. Belshazzar was mewin' and clawin' something frantic. Davey was walkin' around the room with the coal-oil can sprinklin' oil all over my new ingrain carpet. 'What in the nation be you doing, Davey?' I says. 'I'm a-goin' to offer up a bloody sackerfice,' says Davey. 'Belshazzar is the lamb. First I'm purifying the premises like Moses done, with oil.' I flew at Davey. I give him the trouncin' of his life. That very night he done up his little blue gingham shirt and cotton flannel nightie and I haven't saw him since. All I ever heard was he went cabin boy on a whaler to the arctic."

Mother Blunderbuss stared hard at the tablecloth across which her finger resumed its geometric travels. The Apostle cleared his throat.

"I know, Mother; it's too bad. But what's all that got to do with this here deceiver in the kitchen?"

"It's got this to do: Since my Davey left, I never have, and never will, turn any poor boy from my door while I've got a door. Cherry was sick. I took him in. Maybe, now, my Davey has needed to be took in. If so be, I've faith that he's been took in. But I've got to keep on doin' for other boys that's needful, or my faith ain't got no more virtue into it than skimmed dish water. I'm goin' according to my lights, I'm follerin' the Scriptor as I reads it, I'm castin' my loaves and fishes onto the waters, whence, after many days, they will return unto me."

The Apostle's face relaxed in a grin.

"It's cast your bread onto the waters, Mother, not loaves and fishes."

Instantly Mother brought a disputatious forefinger, pointed pistol fashion, to bear upon Apostle.

"Nonsense, Apostle—and you a fol-lerer of the net and capstan—which is the sensibler to cast into the water, just loaves, or loaves and fish? If you had a fish you was expectin' to return, where would you cast him—into the coal bin? No, sir. Cast your fish into the water, and heave in a hunk of bread likewise for him to eat. That's my system. Start blessings out into the world whenever you can, and start 'em out on a full stummick."

Bigpaw Cinnamon, wagging his enormous head like a nervous, caged grizzly, obtruded himself into the conversation:

"I don't rightly understand the argument. Does this Cherry cook get keel-hauled, or don't he?"

"He don't."

"You won't throw him out, Mother?" whined the Apostle. "You won't can him?"

"No. That's final. Now what?"

Slowly the Apostle arose, shambled across the floor, followed by Bigpaw and the rest. At the door, Apostle turned.

"We'll let you know, Mother, a little later—what."

IV.

A HARD blow had resulted in three badly torn gill nets. Against the morning's favorable tide, the fishermen were working swiftly with warp and bobbin to repair the damage. Immediately adjoining the net racks upon which the web was stretched were the ways where scows and dories were hauled up for repairs. A recreant hen, abjuring the neat little henhouse which Mother with her own hands had built, had scratched herself a nest in the soft earth beneath the shelter of a derelict scow. Hither, in quest of Biddy's matutinal offering, followed Cherry, crawling under the ways from the side nearest the house and farthest removed from the net racks. As the sound of grumbling voices came to his ears, Cherry nearly crushed the warm, white egg that lay in the palm of his hand. As they worked, the Apostle, Sawlog, Bigpaw, and Captain Culbertson offered audible and profane amendments to a plan which they were perfecting.

When Cherry finally crawled from beneath the scows on the house side, his blowzy countenance had bleached to a fish-belly white. He scuttered for the kitchen door, paused a moment to listen, then slunk into his own tiny, lean-to room. Mother Blunderbuss, in her own room in the front part of the house, was singing with shrill fervor: "Show-wowers of blessings, oh, that to-day they might fa-hall."

Upon his knees, Cherry hauled his canvas dunnage bag from beneath the bed and began thrusting in shirts, socks, underwear, his cook's apron, two celluloid collars, and, dearest sartorial possession of all, a red silk made-up necktie with a frontal ornamentation of hand-painted lilies of the valley.

He tiptoed to the small rear window, parted the clean muslin curtains, and looked out. It was but a step to the shelter of the fir forest, where opened

a narrow trail leading to the opposite side of the island, and where, at the season, the drivers used to drive the fish-trap piles. The way of escape lay ready and easy before him. He would cross the island, appropriate a dory, row to Lummi Island, catch the mail boat which met the incoming packet boat at Anacortes.

Cherry began casting up a reckoning on his fingers, communing silently with himself:

"If Lobsouse starts for here directly he gets my letter, I'll head him off at Anacortes. If he ain't on the packet, I'll stick on the mail boat and go on into Friday Harbor, where he is. I and him can bunk in his tent for a spell. I got a dollar and eighty cents. That'll be for bacon and coffee. We can borry a clam gun and dig clams. We can live a month—maybe more."

A step sounded upon the kitchen floor. Cherry kicked the bulging dunnage bag beneath the bed, and fell to manicuring his nails with a match, an exercise so unwonted as to arouse instant suspicion.

"I aim to set sponge to-night, Cherry," said Mother, rattling away at the range; "you boil and smash me some spuds."

"All right, Mother."

"Well, come on, and be about it. This ain't no rest cure."

Something appeared to have suddenly deprived the muscles and vertèbræ of Cherry's neck of all function. When he appeared finally in the doorway, his red head rolled about in a manner almost to threaten the instant disarticulation of that member.

"Where's your apron?" demanded Mother, studying the boy sharply. "What's the matter of you? Get that apron on and wash them spuds."

The apron, of course, was in the dunnage bag.

"I guess I must of mislaid my apron somewheres, Mother."

With sounding, purposeful step, Mother marched to the door and surveyed the interior of Cherry's room.

"Where's your clothes? Come, now!"

Cherry's lambent head described half a circumference, came to rest, the chin upon the breastbone.

"I was goin' away; I stowed my riggin' in the dunnage bag."

"Goin' away? Where to?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? What in furyation has struck you? No shenanigan with me, boy. Out with it!"

"They're goin' to shanghai me, put me on a cod fisher—send me to Bering Sea. I'd die! I'd die! I could never stand the cold—the abuse—the kickin' around."

"Shanghai you! Who?"

"The Apostle, Sawlog Stevens, Big-paw Cinnamon—all the boarders is in the deal. I heard 'em when I was huntin' eggs. To-night they figger on comin' here and grabbin' me, takin' me in a dory to Sinclair, handin' me over to Jim Shepherdson that sails north to-morrow. They said that up among the icebergs and polar bears, without no fool woman to take my part, would cure me of the cookin' habit."

Her breast heaving, Mother Blunderbuss glared at Cherry for a moment. She advanced into the room, flounced down upon her knees, hauled the dunnage bag from beneath the bed. Pointing to the bag, she uttered one word, "Unpack!" then walked into the kitchen, seized the potato masher, and was still swinging it militantly when Cherry joined her.

"Shanghai you! Don't you turn a spoke, but lay to your course. No hair of your head will get hurt. Shanghai my cook! To-night, this very blessed night, I aim to show once and for all who's runnin' the Hotel de Blunderbuss. Peel and mash them spuds."

V.

THE evening meal was consumed in ominous silence. After the dishes had been washed, wiped, and stacked away, and the men had all repaired to the bunk house, situated some fifty yards distant, Mother picked up a water pail and started for the supply house, where oil, paint, net warp, and other appurtenances of the fishing craft were stored. Upon her return, she built up the kitchen fire, placed the pail and its contents upon the stove, and began preparations to withstand siege. From the inside, she securely nailed the doors and windows of Cherry's room, locked and bolted the door of the dining room which opened onto the front veranda, drew the curtains, then pasted bits of paper over keyholes and cracks.

At sight of this warlike preconcertation, Cherry began to wobble again.

"Let me go, Mother," he whined. "I've got time yet. I can slip through the woods, grab a dory, and beat it. Please, Mother. You don't know Bigpaw Cinnamon; wild alligators is tame alongside of him. Please!"

Compassion struck to her heart as she contemplated the wretched, cringing figure, the twitching hands, the face as colorless as the potato mash simmering upon the stove.

"Well," said she slowly, reluctantly, "if you're so plumb terrified, like as not you had better go. It ain't my system, though, by no means it ain't!"

"I'll go! I'll go! Yes, yes. That's best." Cherry dashed into his room, and with quaking hands began thrusting his effects back into the dunnage bag.

The boy came back into the kitchen, dragging the bag after him.

"Look out the side window, Mother," he directed through chattering teeth. "If the way is clear, sing out, and I'll run for it."

As he started toward the rear door,
IIB TN

Mother's broad hand lowered itself lightly to his shoulder.

"Hold on, boy," said she, her voice immeasurably kinder than he had ever heard it before. "Hold on. Let's figger this over once more. Do you know, Cherry, that if a party runs once he's pretty apt to keep on runnin' all the rest of his days? And for me to let you run now is the same as me runnin', too. Drat if I will! Hang them clothes back on the hooks. Don't be afraid. Bigpaw Cinnamon won't never lay hand onto you. Mother Blunderbuss and her hull army will stand between."

Cherry slunk wretchedly into the lean-to room, dropped the bundle upon the floor, then cowered behind the door. Mother, crossing the dining room, entered her own room, lighted the lamp, seated herself where her shadow fell athwart the window. After a time she arose, blew out the light, fumbled in a bureau drawer, returned to the kitchen.

"Spunk up, Cherry! Spunk up!"

The miserable creature poked his head through the door. Mother walked to the stove, gave the contents of the galvanized pail a stir with the huge dipper, then crossed to the mantel and extinguished the single kerosene lamp. Save for the pencils of red light which shot from the front of the stove, the room was in darkness.

Presently cautious footsteps were heard to approach the window of Cherry's room. A creaking, ineffectual attempt to lift the sash was followed by a hoarsely whispered conference. Some one stepped softly to the veranda; more whispering followed.

Mother began to chuckle softly to herself as she took up her station by the stove, one hand softly stirring the contents of the big pail.

"They'll have to come in at that one door," she whispered. "When they come, they'll find me all ready to repel boarders like it said in Davey's pirate

book. Repel boarders, the capting shouted."

Mother stifled another chuckle as the outer door opened softly. There, in the semidarkness, loomed the gigantic form of Bigpaw Cinnamon. He advanced a step, Sawlog, the Apostle, and Capstan Culbertson filing in behind. One farther pace Mother permitted the invaders to advance.

"Well," exclaimed she sharply, lowering the dipper into the pail, "might I ask what you all are sneakin' in for this time o' night? Maybe now you're hungry? No? What, then?"

"S' long as we're ketched," replied Bigpaw sullenly, "we might as well show our chart. We're after that Cherry cook, and we're goin' to have him."

"So?" answered Mother, her voice executing a crescendo of sarcastic interrogation.

"Yes," replied the Apostle placatingly. "We ain't going to hurt him; we're just going to get rid of him."

"Come on," said Bigpaw, starting forward. "There ain't no use palaverin'."

"Stop!"

Unheeding, Bigpaw lumbered ahead. Mother dipped the dipper, spread her arm, gave it a swing and a flirt. A great slosh of boiling-hot tar struck the side of Mr. Cinnamon's bull neck, ran in fiery, agonizing streams down the inside of his open, blue flannel shirt. With a roar that would have shamed the fog siren on the point, Bigpaw crushed the Apostle and Sawlog to the floor, caromed off the door jamb, fell screaming and cursing onto the porch. Again and again Mother swung the dipper. Howling like souls in torment, the fishermen ran, fell, crawled, scrambled into the yard, and in vast disorder retreated to the bunk house.

"Cherry, the fight's over. Come on out and strike a light."

Cherry crawled from beneath the

bed and struck a match. The walls and floor of the kitchen dripped tar.

"Ain't that a sight?" said Mother, shaking her head dolefully. "It'll take a age to clean this kitchen." Then she sighed deeply. "After all," she philosophized, "in spite of this muss, it's best to settle a row without no bloodshed. Still, if worst had come to worst——"

She flirted her apron aside. Depending from her right hip, in an old, black leather holster, was a six-shooter of the siege-gun type.

VI.

MIDNIGHT found Mother and

Cherry just completing the rehabilitation of the kitchen. Cherry was upon his knees, in one hand a dustpan full of cold tar, a haggle-edged butcher knife in the other. "I ain't sure but what Lobscouse will be on the packet boat, Mother," said he. "There, she just whistled for the pass."

Mother lifted a stove lid and placed the kettle over the blaze. "I'm beat plumb out," she said. "I aim to have a cup of tea and go to bed. Get out that cold meat, Cherry, and some pie; we'll have a snack here in the kitchen."

The packet boat grated against the piles of the dock, whistled hoarsely, and was away. A timid knock sounded upon the door. Cherry looked up at Mother questioningly.

"Well, you mudhead, go let him in. Act like you're tickled, anyway. I'll bet the boy is hungry."

Mother hustled to the cupboard, emerged with her hands full of dishes for a third place at table. Cherry's guest, Lobscouse, shuffled awkwardly across the floor. Mother turned, looked over her glasses, then under them, then through them. With a glad cry she started forward, the brown hands and the plump arms stretched forth.

"Davey! It's Davey! Mother has got a hot bite all ready for you. Set right down, Davey."



Tale of the Canadian North-

To the Victor.

By

William Merriam Rouse-

THE eagle is not the crow, nor is a Huron the same manner of man as a Nascaupée. Therefore, Monsieur Jules Chauret, Huron gentleman, smoked the best tobacco of Factor Jean Simard and talked to him as an equal; while the Nascaupées sat on the other side of the fire and held their peace, as was right and proper. It was mid-winter, and Chauret would have been a welcome guest even had he not been the long-time friend of Jean Simard.

The talk had gone from caribou to the latest news of Quebec and at length had died away as the short afternoon waned. The only sound in the big, low-ceilinged room was the irregular snapping of the fire. The feet of Simard and of Chauret were stretched to the blaze, and the pleasant warmth had penetrated through their *bottes sauvages* and through many thicknesses of woolen socks. Their pipes drew well. And to Simard, at least, there was satisfaction in the picture—the fire striking red and yellow through the dusk, the dim, motionless forms of a

pair of Nascaupées, and the clean-cut profile of Jules Chauret.

Into this calm came suddenly the thunder of imperative blows upon the door. Now an Indian or a white man of the North would have walked in without noise. Afternoon callers are not frequent in the District of Ungava. The factor and Chauret were on their feet instantly, and when the former laid hand upon the door to open it he did so with his body poised and ready for whatever might come in out of the white wastes. What came was of the nature of a miracle in that place.

A woman stepped lightly into the room and paused, with a glance that challenged and enticed and flouted all in one instant. Many layers of clothing had not hidden the lithe grace of her body, nor miles of cold traveling dimmed her spirit. It was different with the man who followed her. There was a droop to his body and deep-cut lines of protest in what could be seen of a face unmistakably handsome. Behind him were two Montagnais, who were simply Montagnais.

"Bon jour, madame et monsieur!" greeted Simard, swallowing his astonishment. The woman answered him politely in the French of Paris, but the man flung himself down upon the bench of Chauret and spoke in English: "Enough, Eve! Here we stay!"

The eyes of Jules Chauret, in which there was an expression such as a Huron rarely permits himself, went from the woman to the man and back to the woman. She laughed lightly as she began to unwind her thick woolen scarf. "This is my brother, Franklin Adams," she said. "He is quite disgusted because I have dragged him into the Far North to hunt caribou. But he is a very good brother for all that, and his good humor will be restored presently."

"You come far for caribou," said the factor slowly. Then he added, with haste: "Of course you are very welcome—we are honored."

"Can you put us up decently?" asked Adams. "The guides will live with your Indians, of course."

"You shall have the best at Fort Nascaupée," answered Simard. "I will give you quarters in the storehouse. As you may have noticed, the only other buildings besides this one are the kitchen and the powder house."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the woman. "We will go there now. Come, Frank!"

Her gaze, now compelling, swept Adams and the factor along with her out of doors. The Montagnais followed with the packs and guns, and the Nascaupées of the fort followed them. When Jean Simard returned to the main building, after half an hour of hospitality, he found Chauret gazing, motionless, into the dying fire. He had not taken trouble to keep it up, nor to light candles. "What a woman!" he said in a low voice, turning to his friend.

The factor was astonished, and he considered his answer well: "Yes; but,

like the powder house out at the edge of the clearing, dangerous."

"Danger is good for the soul!"

"There is good danger, my friend, and bad danger," said the factor.

Jules Chauret threw back his shoulders. "Do you think I am a fool, Jean? Or do you think that the red man should not look upon the white woman with seeing eyes?"

Before opening his mouth to answer either of those hard questions, Simard filled his pipe with greater care than he had given to the task in many days. Truth would compel him to answer yes to the first question, and he was of a mind to ignore it altogether. To the second there were two answers, and he strove to give them clearly: "You, Jules, have been to school and the university, and you have the blood of chiefs. I, who am your friend, know that you are a better gentleman than many a man of pure French or English strain; yet these two strangers are rich Americans and they do not think as we think. All this is reason, and reason often fails. But the woman's eyes are dangerous, and that is greater than reason—it is one of the things a man feels in his soul."

There was a moment of silence, and then the voice of the Huron, low but intense, came through the semidarkness of the big room: "Do not speak evil of her, Jean!"

"Pardon!" growled the factor quickly, and he set about lighting candles with a silent malediction upon all women whose eyes would not behave themselves. No more was said between them on that subject.

II.

THAT evening, Eve and Franklin Adams came into the big room where Simard lived and traded and held his court among the Nascaupées; and there they sat until late, to the

great, although repressed, joy of Jules Chauret, and the increasing wonder of the factor.

A child could have seen that the man did not want to stay, that he did not want to talk, that he did not want to be in the North. He hated the cold and said so; snow and wind he took as personal insults. Of weapons and the ways of game he knew little or nothing, and no heart-stirring tale of Jules Chauret could move him to more than passing interest.

The woman, however, was all fire and enthusiasm. If she made mistakes in her talk of guns, she covered them quickly, and her eagerness to learn made them easily forgotten. Indeed, the charm of her so permeated that place that it seeped into the questioning heart of Jean Simard and for the time made him believe that she was no more than a self-willed daughter of the rich who dragged an unpleasant brother at the wheel of her caprice. Her eyes, now melting, now flashing little sparks in answer to the firelight, held the gaze of every man there, red and white, save only Franklin Adams. The Montagnais and the Nascaupes looked upon her unwinkingly from the moment she entered until she rose to go.

After that night followed days of a kind that Fort Nascaupée had never known. The two visitors made the difference, and to Simard came the thought, after a time, that they had turned the clean, cold winter into a kind of sickly spring—overwarm and nourishing to emotions that are not good for men who have work to do, and worse for men who have no work.

Franklin Adams brooded and smoked close to the fire, talking very little, and a door never opened behind him that his head did not turn toward it quickly with the look of one who has reason to guard the rear. The woman, however, neither brooded nor looked behind. She lived in each moment as it

came, and she fired the battery of her eyes upon Montagnais and Nascaupée, making them slaves, and upon the big Huron most of all.

It developed that the Americans who had come to Fort Nascaupée to hunt caribou did not wish to hunt caribou; but this did not seem strange to Jules Chauret, for he was busy teaching Eve to shoot. It appeared to the factor that in spite of her glib talk of the first evening she had never known the feel of a rifle butt against her shoulder.

He, Simard, watched these lessons with uneasiness, for it seemed to him that the looks of Franklin Adams grew blacker than ordinary when they were directed toward Chauret, and that a tenseness slowly gathered in the atmosphere. It was such a feeling as one has when the world is still before a great blizzard. On a day when this feeling was strong within the factor, it became necessary for him to go to the powder house. He left Chauret dreaming by the fire in the main building, and, drawing on his Mackinaw and fur casque, went out along the snow tunnel that led to the magazine.

The air had warmed a little that day and the snow did not creak beneath his *bottes sauvages*, so he approached the powder house noiselessly, and was about to lift the big iron key to the door when the voice of Franklin Adams, raised in anger, came to his ears: "I tell you I won't have it!"

There followed a moment's silence, during which Simard realized that Adams, of necessity on snowshoes, must be just beyond the corner of the building. The factor, down in the path, was completely hidden by drifts which rose above his head. He was in the act of drawing breath to cough and give warning of his presence when the voice of Adams rose almost to a scream of rage: "You're letting that dirty Indian flirt with you! Haven't you done enough of the devil's work already?"

Then came the answer of Eve, mocking, but soft and vibrant with charm: "Flirt with me? Why, Franklin! He's merely courting me."

"Stop it, I tell you! I can't stand this another day!"

"Oh, yes, you will!" she said. "You are not the same brave man you were in a drawing-room."

"I'll show you whether I am or not before night!"

With that they moved away; and Simard, greatly disturbed, got out the keg of powder for which he had come and returned with it upon his shoulder to the main building.

III.

JULES CHAURET still sat by the fire, dreaming. Simard hung the key to the powder house upon its accustomed nail and went out again, seized by a sudden determination. He found the woman after a time, alone in her quarters, and spoke directly of what was in his mind. "Mamselle Adams," he began, "may I say something of importance to you?"

"Indeed, yes!" she answered, and her eyes laughed at him. "You may!"

"It is to ask that you do something to cure my friend Jules Chauret of his madness for you."

She winced at the suddenness of it, and then she smiled. "But why cure him, m'sieu?"

"Would you marry him?"

She shrugged.

"You would not? Then I tell you that the Hurons are as great in their wrath as they are in their love!"

With that Jean Simard turned squarely on his heel and walked out of the storehouse. It was all that he could do for his friend, and he felt that it was little enough, for more than ever that afternoon the feeling of depression that was upon Fort Nascaupee struck into him. It seemed to reach his bones;

and when evening came, he dreaded the hour when, by ancient custom, all those at the fort gathered about the fire in the main building.

Chauret and Simard and the Montagnais and Nascaupees were there when Eve came in, laughing at some cause which she alone knew. She flung jacket, mittens, and cap into a corner; and then, choosing a bench where the fire could draw lights from her eyes and hair, she sent a glance into the face of Jules Chauret for which the factor could have struck her—almost. He felt that she was playing some game unfathomable to him; and he had no more than time to think this before the door swung inward and Franklin Adams entered.

Adams, more darkly handsome than ever because of the emotion that boiled and pressed within him, stood like a man who hesitates on the brink of an icy plunge. He looked straight at the Huron, who returned his stare calmly, and then away. The woman, watching him, smiled. His hands twitched. For an instant Simard held his breath—until the American, resolution oozing out of him, walked to a bench and sullenly sank down upon it. The woman's face shone with triumph.

How Chauret interpreted this momentary, silent drama the factor could not guess. He wore unruffled the calm of his race, and as he looked at Franklin Adams at this time there was neither like nor dislike in his glance. Only for Eve did it change, softening and glowing as it had when first he looked upon her.

It was he who now broke the silence that had fallen upon all of them. "Mamselle has learned to shoot very straight with the rifle," he said. "Now, perhaps, I may have the pleasure of teaching her to use the bow, the weapon of my fathers?"

As though this compliment and request were the spark needed to fire the

courage of Franklin Adams, the man leaped to his feet with an imprecation that seemed to rip and crackle through the tenseness of the room. "You've played cavalier to a white woman long enough!" he shouted. "If she won't put you in your place, I will!"

Jules Chauret rose to his feet slowly, with all the composure of the limitless North in his bearing. The woman also arose, looking from one to the other of the men as if she were gauging them. It seemed that Adams had done the thing she had not believed him capable of doing.

Chauret's answer to the challenge was never made, for even as he opened his lips to speak, another voice cut across the room and drew the eyes of the men, white and red, and of Eve toward the doorway. "Good evening."

The two words of greeting came from the lips of a big man—a man as tall and broad as Chauret and much more heavily set. He came in on the balls of his feet, with a couple of half-breeds at his back, and for a fraction of a second Jean Simard would have sworn that the stranger had come to take Fort Nascaupee by storm. Eve took a slow step backward, and her throat moved above the collar of her flannel jacket. Adams stood motionless in the spot where he had delivered his insult to Jules Chauret.

"Does no one here speak English?" asked the stranger. "Surely I see two good American faces there by the fire."

This was not a remarkable thing to say, but the factor thought he felt a sneer in the voice of the newcomer and he did not like the sound of it. "We speak both tongues here, m'sieu—politely!" he said.

"Pardon!" The man stripped off his big mitten and held out a powerful hand. "My name is Roger Borden, of New York. Your American guests may know the name?"

He turned toward them, staring straight into the face of Eve.

"It is Mamselle Adams and her brother Monsieur Adams," said Simard. "And Monsieur Jules Chauret."

Roger Borden bowed with such a bow as a man might make in a ball-room. This was for the woman. He ignored Adams and turned to Chauret with a friendly word. The Huron replied briefly and with dignity. It was plain that he, no more than the factor, knew not what to make of this stranger who had come hurtling in out of the night. Men who are not pressed by a great haste do not travel by night.

The half-breeds, disdaining the Nascaupees and Montagnais, sat down at a distance from the fire, but with weariness that showed they had come far and fast. Borden had taken off his cap and mittens and unbuttoned his Mackinaw. Now one hand went inside his shirt and rested there as he strode full into the firelight with his back to Chauret and his face toward Eve and Franklin Adams.

Neither of them had spoken since his coming, and neither of them spoke now; but they drew back a little, and away from each other. For the moment the woman's eyes had ceased to flash with their eternal challenge and lure. Jean Simard knew from the depths of his being that some strange thing was about to happen, yet he was helpless to interfere, for he had no remotest glimmering of what the thing might be.

IV.

IT might have been five seconds that Borden stood silently gazing at the other Americans. "Adams!" he remarked at length. "Why choose an honest name like that, Eve?"

With the question his hand suddenly flashed from his shirt front, and with it came a long, blazing, shimmering cloud of scarlet, a cloud of silk so light

that it seemed to float in air. It was a scarf, priceless, no doubt, and such a thing as a beautiful woman would delight in. It waved from the hand of Borden as though it were alive.

With one gesture of denunciation and contempt he flung the scarf at Eve so that its folds draped about her, winding her from neck to moccasins and making her a swaying, glistening statue of scarlet. "You forgot that when you left!" said Borden. "So I brought it for you."

Even quicker than Roger Borden had drawn forth the scarlet scarf, Jules Chauret leaped upon him. The Huron did not strike; he closed as a panther closes. For a long moment the men heaved and strained, body to body, and then Borden spun the width of the room as if he had been belched from the mouth of a cannon. He struck on head and shoulders in a corner, with a crack that told of broken bones, and lay still.

All this happened before Jean Simard could intervene, or decide, in fact, where lay his duty. Now he made a sign with his hand, and as Chauret started toward the man he had hurled to unconsciousness, Montagnais and Nascaupees and half-breeds threw themselves upon him and bore him down under a kicking, writhing heap of bodies. Franklin Adams cowered at a corner of the fireplace. Eve stood motionless save that her breathing rippled the folds of the scarlet silk.

Jean Simard watched the heap on the floor, doubting his eyes. For out of that tangle of fighting men the Huron slowly rose up, throwing them off as a bear throws off dogs. He lifted one of Borden's half-breeds into the air and dashed him against the planks of the floor; he struck right and left, and two Nascaupees went down and rolled slowly away from the fight. A Montagnais reeled backward with his hands to his face. Then the fight ended, and Chauret stood victorious.

Borden stirred in his corner and raised himself upon one elbow. He caught the gaze of the Huron. "Ask her, you fool!" he cried, leveling a finger at the woman. "You and I and that sniveling coward in the shadows are not the first men she's broken! She does not dare to give me the lie!"

V.

FOR the first time the factor saw doubt come into the face of the Huron. Chauret turned and looked at the woman, with a question written plain in his glance.

Perhaps she believed it hopeless to try to hold him; perhaps she was tired of playing a game with men; perhaps the devil drove her to see how far she could go, whispering that she could not lose. Certain it was that she smiled up at Jules Chauret, and then she laughed, while the light of mockery danced in her eyes. "Men are all alike," she said, defying him. "You cry when you burn your fingers! Is it my fault that men fall in love with me?"

A moment Chauret swung undecided; then, with a mighty joy shaking his voice, he cried out: "Not all! There is one who does not blame you."

Jules Chauret swept her up in his arms, and the man and woman flashed out of the door into the night.

Adams took a step forward, and Borden tried to rise; but the factor barred the door and stood with his back to it. "Messieurs," said he quietly, "those two shall go in peace—it is my command. Until now I did not know what it was about mademoiselle that puzzled me. But now I know. She is splendid and fine, and she was waiting for a man with the courage to fight for her and take her when he had won. Messieurs, not one of us in this room is worthy of her. She has found her true mate, and she will be happy, for Jules, too, is splendid."

That Lion's Tail—



By
Ima Nutt—

OCTOBER, the thirty-first, with a nip in the air of coming fall. A year ago to-day occurred a little event which caused more than a passing ripple in the smooth surface of life's events in Dawson's Dells; an event which— But let me particularize, and from the beginning.

Personally I have never pulled a lion's tail. I am free to confess that, in my more frivolous moments, I have felt a great longing to do so. Yet, when opportunity presented and I have approached a lion's cage with the secret intention of pulling his tail, something always has deterred me. Whether it was the look of dumb appeal in the animal's eye—whether it was something else which held me back—I will not at this moment say.

In those days, a first cousin of mine named Pinckney Fink lived with his mother on the old home place, a mile or so out from Dawson's Dells. They did not have much land, but it was enough to keep them had Pinckney stayed at home and looked after it properly. But he was a shiftless youngster with no serious thought, obsessed solely with the idea of having a good time and

with a decided preference for dances, husking parties, and country frolics; hard work around his own little farm did not appeal to him. The place, as a consequence, began to run down rapidly until finally Pinckney and his mother were in actual want.

He was such a likable chap; so willing to help everybody except himself, so willing to promise to do better when any of us tried to reason with him, that there wasn't any such thing as getting angry with him, though we could all see how it would end if he did not change his trifling ways.

Adjoining the Fink place was a fine old farm of some eight hundred acres belonging to Miss Elmira Stowe. Her parents had died suddenly, leaving her the place; and there she lived alone except for an aunt of hers—just those two in the big, rambling old house. But they kept things spick and span around the place, looked after the hired help, and no farm in the neighborhood was better run, and none turned out bigger crops each year than Elmira Stowe's.

Long before this time, as little bare-foot children, Pinckney and Elmira used to trudge along to school together. He carried her books for her and her

little dinner box. He fought battles for her, too, when the boys called her "redhead;" which was true enough, but no one was going to tell her so when Pinckney was around—not without a fight! They were sweethearts then, though not knowing their happy comradeship by any such name. But at last they grew up, and Elmira's parents sent her off to a fashionable school for young ladies somewhere back East; and Pinckney just stayed around home, loafing and enjoying himself.

After a while Elmira came back again to Dawson's Dells a grown young lady, and prettier than ever, knowing as she did how to dress attractively, how to stand and walk properly, with all that poise and haughty-glare business that comes with a few years at finishing school. Pinckney—big, awkward, good-natured countryman—somehow realized the gulf that had come between him and the little redhead for whom he used to fight at school.

Then Elmira's parents died; the girl began to show the stuff she was made of, down below that finishing-school veneer. She put aside the pretty clothes she had brought back from the city; she sold her little saddle pony; she gave up her tennis and golf and settled down to *work*! Man, the crops that old Stowe farm brought forth the next year were a wonder to the community.

II.

PINCKNEY did not quite know what to make of Elmira when first she came back to Dawson's Dells such a fine lady. He stayed sort of shy of her, until events proved that she was not a bit more "stuck up" than when a girl. When young Pinck saw that she was not too proud to get into her old duds and look after things around her farm, he began to take notice with renewed hope.

One day he asked her to marry him. She turned him down flat; finished him off good and proper—with that finishing-school manner she could put on when occasion seemed to demand it.

It was not because of his country clothes and manner and lack of polish and all that—Elmira hadn't any such fool notions; and she knew that despite all his roughness Pinckney had a big, true heart; but she was not figuring on taking any boy to raise; she had made up her mind that Pinck must prove himself a man before he came looking for *her*! She could not help seeing how things went on his own farm; such shiftlessness as that quite disgusted her, and she was not slow about telling him. Thus things drifted along, with Pinckney the same trifling, no-account, lovable sort of ne'er-do-well, loving his thrifty little neighbor with all his heart, and she giving him precious little encouragement for so doing.

Along toward the last of October, when the harvesting was all done, Roscoe Hogan—living over on the ridge beyond Dawson's Dells—decided to give a Halloween party and dance in his new red barn. Most of the details and preliminaries concerning invitations and various arrangements he turned over to Mr. Pinckney Fink, knowing they would be carefully looked after and the success of the occasion assured from the start.

Pinckney was all stirred up over the affair—more so than he had been all summer about getting his own crops in. He went around from house to house, taking the invitations to Hogan's party. He was happy, too, in his planning, for Elmira had promised to come over to Hogan's with some of the neighbors; then, when the frolic was over, he was to walk home with her—along the same old road where in the years gone by they had wandered hand in hand as little children.

The night of Hogan's party came.

Soon after nightfall all of the invited guests arrived, together with some hundred or so of the younger generation, who, though overlooked in the inviting, scorned to allow so slight a detail as that to prevent their being among those present. The floor of the big barn had been swept clean, allowing plenty of space for Halloween games and dancing; and here the laughing, happy throng gathered.

Elmira was there, her pretty cheeks flushed with anticipation and the excitement of the occasion—for that finishing-school finish had worn off somewhat—and looking wonderfully sweet in her simple gown of white. There were other girls there, too, looking prettily flushed and wonderfully sweet in gowns of white, but, though Pinckney had a pleasant word of greeting for all, most of the time he could be found close by the side of his little neighbor, Elmira Stowe.

Well, when all the noise and uproar and fun of the games were at full height, some one in the crowd came running over to where Pinckney was standing in the center of the floor with a big tin platter he was about to spin—you know the old game, "spin the platter"—and told him that beneath the manger in one of the stalls was a *live lion*.

Pinckney had been joking all the evening and in turn had so many jokes played on him that he supposed this was another one arranged for his special benefit; so, still carrying the tin platter, he walked over to the stall, bold as could be.

The clamor died down. The guests crowded around Pinckney, some in real, some in affected, fright. Sure enough, there beneath the manger was a great, tawny form, with a long tail sticking out. Pinckney knew well enough now that a job had been put up on him; like enough it was a stuffed lion skin, so he turned to the breathless crowd and

said grandly: "Folks—do you know how I kill lions?"

The crowd was silent for a moment; then some one spoke up: "How do you kill lions, Pinckney?"

"I grab 'em by the tail," he answered, "and *snap* 'em till I break their backs!" With that he reached down and gave the lion's tail an awful jerk.

III.

THERE was a scuffling of the tawny form; then a roar which shook the rafters. Like a flash of yellow light, the great beast lurched forth, caught up Pinckney in its great jaws, and, bounding through a window six feet above, scurried off in the moonlight down the road.

The men stood transfixed with amazement and horror; the women screamed, and some swooned. But Elmira, her face as white as the gown she wore, sprang out of the door and ran down the road after the lion and its swaying burden.

The beast, we learned later, had escaped from a circus which had been showing in a town just above Dawson's Dells that afternoon, and had sneaked along the fields and woods, striking the road at Hogan's just as the guests were beginning to arrive; frightened by the noise and clamor into seeking shelter, it had crept into the barn and beneath the manger.

Down the road it bounded with Pinckney then for a distance of three hundred yards, the platter which Pinckney still clasped banging against the stones with a frightful din, so that the beast, terrified, dropped its burden and fled, its tail between its legs.

When Elmira reached him, Pinckney Fink had fainted dead away. She knelt beside him, raised his head tenderly in her lap, and loosened his collar. When he opened his eyes, she was whispering words to him that made him for-

get altogether the lion whose tail he had rudely pulled; made him forget about everything except just what she was saying to him.

Of course she was not foolish enough to think that Pinckney had known it was a real lion when he did his audacious stunt; even if he had known it, that would still not have been proof sufficient that he was worthy of her. But when she saw him in actual danger—well, then it came over her all of a sudden how much she really cared for him, and she was willing at last to take a chance.

She had the right hunch, too; that finishing-school training had not blunted her good common sense. And with her love and confidence young Pinckney Fink became the man we all knew he was capable of becoming if forced into it. They were married that fall, and both seem glad of it.

And while, since then, Pinckney has done many deeds of perhaps more real benefit to the community of Dawson's Dells at large—though perhaps not more to his own good fortune—always I think of him, not without some envy, as the man who pulled a lion's tail and got away with it—the deed—with very evident success.

Not Like a Lawyer

THE case was one of pocket picking. The prisoner's counsel had a bad name for bullying the witnesses, and as the principal one for the prosecution was a nervous-looking young man, the hope of bringing in a conviction was very dim.

The thief's lawyer cross-examined the young man shamefully. He roared at him, shook his fist at him, raved at him.

"And at what hour did all this happen?" the lawyer, sneering, asked, toward the end of his examination.

"I think——" began the witness; but he was at once interrupted.

"We don't care anything about what you think!" said the lawyer, with a snort of contempt.

"Don't you want to hear what I think?" asked the other mildly.

"Certainly not!" the lawyer roared.

"Then," was the quiet response, "I may as well step down from the box. I'm not a lawyer. I can't talk without thinking."

Another Foolish One

VISITOR at a hospital in France: "And what did you do when the shell struck you?"

Bored "Tommy": "Sent mother a post card to have my bed ready."

Wonderful Echoes

PROBABLY the finest echo which the world knows of is in the cathedral at Pisa—where the Leaning Tower is. Sing two notes, and there is no reverberation; sing three, and they are at once taken up by the walls of the edifice, swelled, prolonged, and varied till they seem as a divine harmony from some majestic organ.

There is a cavern in Finland in which, if you test your lungs to the top of their capacity, there will answer you such horrible roarings, moanings, and mutterings that you will be glad to rush out in absolute terror.

Undoubtedly the most extraordinary natural echo in the world is to be heard by the side of a small lake in Bavaria. On one hand rises a perpendicular cliff several thousand feet high, while on the other side is a dense forest. If a pistol is fired on the lake the woods send back a faint echo that gradually dies away, but presently it is heard from the cliff, continually increasing in power till it bursts over one's head like a deafening peal of thunder.



Oh! So Woozy!

By

Augustus Wittfeld.



THE tragic has always had a fascination for me, but to stumble into a tragedy as I did that summer afternoon, when I picked up the telephone receiver, was anything but fascinating. The voice that came over the wire was as clear as a bell, and it seemed to thrill with a sense of exultation, as though the speaker was entirely satisfied with his deed. The tone carried no suggestion of either regret or remorse.

Wouldn't it turtle your tranquillity to pick up the telephone receiver and hear some one say: "I grabbed him by the hair with my free hand, and with the other I held the sponge of chloroform over his nostrils. He struggled and fought against it, but as the fumes got in their deadly work his efforts subsided, and in a few minutes old Philo Landis was as dead as the proverbial doornail."

Involuntarily I had listened to the harrowing statement as I held the telephone receiver to my ear, waiting for the operator to connect me with Madge

Manning. As the full import of what I had heard sank into my brain, I turned sick with horror.

That any one could commit such a cold-blooded deed and then boast of it over the telephone seemed incredible, but what followed dissipated any vestige of doubt that may have remained and absolutely shattered my confidence in humanity.

"Please, Chet, spare me the harrowing details," spoke another voice. "I know that it must have been perfectly, awfully terrible, but of course I realize that you considered the step absolutely necessary. Philo Landis was a horrid, unappreciative old brute, and you did perfectly right to—to do what you did. What do you propose doing with the body?"

It was Madge Manning's voice that asked the question, and I could have shrieked when I heard it, for Madge is one of the sweetest, dearest girls in our set.

"I am going to put it in a box and bury it in Dorgan's woods," came the answer. "I'll motor out there after

dark, hiding the box in my car, and finish the job, but I'll have to be mighty careful not to get pinched."

"Oh, Chet, please, please do be awfully careful," cautioned Madge. "But how are you going to explain old Philo Landis' disappearance? People will surely miss him and ask questions."

"Oh, if anybody asks me about him, I'll tell them that he decamped for other quarters," answered Chester. "Guess nobody will be sorry to hear it."

As quietly as I could I hung the receiver on the hook. I had heard enough. That Madge Manning should countenance such a deed was unbelievable, even though it *was* Chester Irwin who had committed it.

II.

I SAT down and thought the whole thing over. Could it be possible that Chester Irwin had chloroformed his crabbed, crusty old uncle? Such a thing did not seem possible; yet Chester had made the statement himself. Why, he had actually seemed to glory in it, and Madge Manning had countenanced the dark deed. Really, the thing actually got my goat.

I know that a lady should never use slang, but when an expression so aptly illustrates one's mental condition that it seems to be the only thing in the English language that one *can* use, it passes from the category of slang and takes its place among the sublimities of literary expression. Emphatically, yes. It got my goat.

I was sorely tempted to call Arthur up and tell him what I had heard, for Chester is a very dear friend of his, but when I stopped to think I knew that it would be useless to do so, as Arthur had, at the breakfast table, deplored the fact that he must take an out-of-town buyer to the ball game in the afternoon. Really, I think it is per-

fectly awful the way that poor boy is overworked.

After considering the matter from every angle, I finally decided to call up Mr. Judson and tell him what I had heard. Perhaps he would be able to do something. I didn't want to see Chester get into any trouble over what he had done; for possibly he had been justified and Mr. Judson would be just the one to help him out. I found his number in the phone book and made the call. After waiting for the longest time, some one answered the phone.

"I would like to speak to Mr. Judson, please," I said.

"Judson!" exclaimed a voice at the other end of the wire. "Say, don't you know that Judson's a detective? Whattud he be doin' sitting around the house when the woods 's full of clews? He's out working on a important case."

"If Mr. Judson is out," I said, "to whom might I be talking?"

"Well, you might be talking to the Emprur of Rooshia, but you ain't," came the surprising statement. "You're talking to Reds the Relentless. I'm Judson's 'sistant."

"How very interesting!" I exclaimed. "I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Reds. Will you not tell Mr. Judson, when he returns, that I called him up?"

"Sure I will," came the reply. "Who'll I say it was?"

"Just tell him it was the lady at the Fairview Apartments," I replied. "He'll know who it was."

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Reds. "But I think you'd better give me your name. They's a lot of other skirts 'at calls him up."

The idea of that awful Mr. Reds referring to *me* as a "skirt." Really, it made me so angry that I could have slapped him. However, as that was impossible under the circumstances, I hung up. One is not compelled to submit to such indignities over the phone.

The fact of Mr. Judson being out left me high and dry, or, as Arthur would express it, "elevated and desiccated." I was in an awful quandary. Should I call up Madge Manning and demand an explanation, or should I call up Sergeant Hagan and tell him what I had heard?

To call up Madge and demand an explanation would be sure to distress her awfully and perhaps result in defeating the ends of justice. Arthur says that justice travels like a push-mobile, but strikes like a gasoline grand, and I am sure that I would not want to be the one who would try to puncture the tire of the wheel of justice.

On the other hand, if I called up Sergeant Hagan and confided in him, it might result in all kinds of trouble for Chester Irwin. The police authorities are perfectly horrid when they suspect any one of having committed a crime. I am sure that the way they put a prisoner through the thirty-third degree must be awfully embarrassing. Assuredly, Sergeant Hagan was out of the question.

Suddenly a bright thought flashed through my mind, and I decided to act upon it. I would call up old Philo Landis' residence and casually inquire about his health or some other trivial matter, and in that way learn whether he had been chloroformed or not. Of course, I had only Chester Irwin's statement, overheard on the phone, that such was the case, and every one knows that what one hears over the phone sometimes must be taken with an awful lot of salt.

I found the number in the book, and requested the operator to make the connection. After a brief interval, I heard some one lift the hook from the receiver. "Lo!" came the monosyllabic salutation.

"May I speak to Mr. Landis, please?" I asked.

"Sorry," came the reply. "But old Landis does not seem to be around."

"Haven't you any idea where he is?" I asked.

"No," replied the voice. "I've been waiting for him for some time, and his housekeeper doesn't seem to be sure where he went."

Something in the voice struck me as familiar. If I was not mistaken, fortune seemed to be dealing me the cards out of an unstacked deck. "Isn't that Mr. Judson speaking?" I asked.

"Surest thing ever," came the reply. "Pretty clever of you, Mrs. Oliver."

"Mercy me!" I exclaimed. "How did you know it was I?"

Mr. Judson chuckled. "Detective stuff," he said. "I'd know *your* voice in a million."

That sounded awfully like what Arthur would call "soft stuff," so I decided to ignore it. I surely would not want Mr. Judson to think that my interest in him was other than what might be termed professional. "Has Mr. Landis been seen to-day?" I asked.

"Why, yes," came the reply. "The housekeeper says that he got up bright and early, and that he disappeared after breakfast. She don't know where he went, but I think that he may have gone to the city to call on his nephew, Chester Irwin. They've been on the outs for some time, you know, and Chester has been doing things to annoy the old man lately."

If Mr. Judson's surmise that old Philo Landis had gone to visit Chester Irwin was correct, then things certainly did look suspicious. I decided to take Mr. Judson into my confidence. "Oh, Mr. Judson!" I exclaimed; "I am sure that something terrible has happened to old Philo Landis. I cannot explain it to you over the phone, but if I could see you for a few minutes, I am sure that I could make it clear to you."

"All right, Mrs. Oliver," agreed Mr.

Judson. "I'll get right back to town and drop in and see you. Guess there's no use waiting for old Landis any longer. So long."

Before I had a chance to offer any objection he had hung up. I would be under the necessity of receiving him in our apartment, but I knew that when I explained the circumstances to Arthur he would approve of my course, especially as I was acting in the interests of his friend, Chester Irwin.

III.

IT was about five o'clock when Mr. Judson arrived, and I immediately proceeded to tell him of what I had heard over the telephone.

He seemed to be awfully interested in my narrative, and he seemed terribly surprised when I told of how Chester Irwin had admitted chloroforming old Philo Landis, and when I repeated what Chester had said about disposing of the body he rubbed his hands together and chuckled with satisfaction. "Good! Good!" he exclaimed. "That makes things a whole lot easier for me. I didn't think that young Irwin had the backbone to pull off a job like that. He certainly is playing into my hands."

"Oh, Mr. Judson!" I cried. "Do you think that Chester will have to go to prison for what he has done? Really, it would be terrible."

"Not if we can keep it from getting to the ears of the authorities," was the surprising reply.

"But, Mr. Judson," I protested, "surely you would not approve of covering up a crime like this. If Chester did what he said he did, and it was premeditated, then I think that justice should be permitted to take its course. But if there was anything to justify what Chester did, I think that we should do all in our power to shield him from the consequences of his act."

"There is absolutely no reason why we should let the police authorities in on this thing," said Mr. Judson. "This is one of those cases that can be handled better without their butting into it. You leave it to me, Mrs. Oliver, and I'll pull Chester Irwin out of the hole he has dug for himself, and he won't even have to pay a fine."

"But, Mr. Judson," I exclaimed, "how in the world will you manage it? People will surely miss old Philo Landis, and they are certain to ask questions."

"We should worry about what people say," replied Mr. Judson. "I don't think anybody will express regret at old Philo's sudden taking-off. He was a nuisance to the community, and young Irwin ain't going to get it in the neck for what he did. I'll be on hand to-night, when he turns up at Dorgan's woods to dispose of the body, and after I've straightened this affair out I think everybody will be satisfied."

That was all I could get out of him, and shortly after he went Arthur came home. "Punk game," he growled, after greeting me as he always does on returning home. Really, Arthur's home-comings are too delightful for anything.

"Poor boy," I said consolingly. "Did the home team put up such a rot—I mean such a miserable game?"

"Oh, the team was all right," Arthur replied. "It was that out-of-town rube. Why, say, Dorothy, I had to sit there through twelve innings and listen to that hick singing pæans of praise to his home team in Sassyfrasville, and tell me what Bill Haymaker or Timothy Tallgrass would have done whenever one of our players made a brilliant play, and, s-a-y! That rube had the nerve to tell me that he was going to get one of their scouts to come here and look our players over with a view

of signing up a couple of them for their home team. Can you beat it?"

"I think that those out-of-town buyers are too horrid for anything," I replied. "It is bad enough that you are compelled to accompany them to the ball game, without having them spoil your enjoyment of it by talking about the amateurish antics of a lot of bushel-league ball players. But, oh, Arthur! I've had the most awfully exciting time this afternoon. Really, I don't know how I am ever going to tell you about it."

"If I might be permitted to make a suggestion," said Arthur, "I would advise you to start at the beginning and work through to the end."

"Arthur Armitage Oliver!" I exclaimed; "I am going to tell you the most entrancingly exciting thing that you ever heard, and I am going to tell it to you in my own way." And I did.

When I told him of the conversation I had heard over the phone, between Madge and Chester, he certainly did sit up and take notice. He tried to interrupt and ask questions, but he quickly realized the futility of such procedure, and subsided, permitting me to relate incident after incident as my story unfolded and to bring it to a triumphant and successful termination.

"Now," I remarked, as I finished, and Arthur sat there in open-mouthed astonishment, "you may ask all the questions you want. Isn't it too absorbingly interesting and exciting for anything?"

"I should say it is," replied Arthur. "Sounds like a yarn from E. Allen Poe. Sure you didn't fall asleep and dream it?"

I haven't the remotest idea who that Poe person is to whom Arthur referred and I told him so, and I also convinced him that I had been very wide awake all afternoon.

"But, great Scott, Dorothy," he

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argued, "Chet Irwin would never commit a deed of that kind!"

"But he said that he did," I insisted. "He fairly seemed to glory in the fact while he was telling Madge about it."

"Well, it beats me!" mused Arthur. "If he's got himself into a mess of that kind, I don't see that we can do much to help him out."

I reminded Arthur that Mr. Judson was "on the job," but the minute that I mentioned the detective's name Arthur gave a most excellent imitation of an indoor aviator.

"Judson!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "That man fills me with fatigue. We don't seem to pull off a quiet little family party without having him butt into it. Believe me, if Jake Judson is on the job, Chet Irwin has got about as much chance as a celluloid dog chasing an asbestos cat through——"

"Arthur," I cautioned him, "restrain yourself. Remember, there are ladies who will read this story."

"I beg your pardon, ladies," said Arthur contritely. "I was merely going to say, 'through an iron foundry.'"

IV.

AFTER Arthur and I had discussed the matter very thoroughly, we decided to motor out to Dorgan's woods and be on the spot at the dénouement. Arthur especially desired to be there, so that he could keep an eye on Mr. Judson and see to it that that individual did not "ball everything up," which, in everyday English, means exactly what it does in slang. Don't you often wonder how the ancients ever managed to get along without slang? It must have been awfully trying.

We arrived at the woods just as it was getting dark, and Arthur ran the car into a grove by the roadside, from which we could watch the approach of the other cars. We had not been in hiding very long when another car

appeared, coming from the city. As it passed our hiding place the driver slowed down, and I pinched Arthur's arm as I recognized Mr. Judson at the wheel. There was another figure seated at his side, and I whispered to Arthur that possibly it was Mr. Reds the Relentless. Mr. Judson proceeded a short distance down the road and also parked his car in a grove on our side of the road.

The stage was now set for the appearance of the heavy villain, as Arthur put it, and I fairly shivered with excitement as the minutes went by. The time passed slowly, and it was awfully weird waiting there in the dim moonlight. The woods were full of eerie noises, and once an owl voiced his admiration of his mate in such an awful manner that I am sure that nobody but a lady owl would have been flattered by the demonstration.

"Sounds like the wail of a woozy wombat," said Arthur, as I shiveringly nestled against him. "Sh—— Here comes Chet now!"

Sure enough, it was Chester. His big touring car was traveling slowly, and, as he passed, we noted that he was alone. He ran his auto into an opening in the woods directly opposite where we were hiding, and brought it to a stop. Then he dimmed his lamps, and in the moonlight, which had grown somewhat brighter, we could see him puttering around the car. As we watched, two figures crept across the road and secreted themselves among the trees. Mr. Judson and Mr. Reds the Relentless were on the job.

Chester, utterly unaware of their presence, took a shovel from his car and started off, carrying it over his shoulder.

"I'm going over to see what those two soft-boiled sleuths are up to," remarked Arthur. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Arthur Armitage Oliver," I protested, "you'll do no such thing. I absolutely refuse to remain here and be scared to death by a love-sick owl."

"Goose," said Arthur, "don't you know that that owl will protect you from mice? The owl eats 'em alive. But come along if you're timid about staying. I want to see what's going on."

Cautiously we crossed the road and gained the edge of the wood. Just then the moon was obscured by a cloud, and we were compelled to stand perfectly still or run the risk of colliding with a tree. After the cloud had passed we picked our way through the trees to where Chet's car was standing, and Arthur explored the tonneau for the box. He poked around for a while, and then he gave a low whistle. "Great Scott! It's gone!" he exclaimed. "Surely Chet hasn't had time to remove it." Then he grasped me by the hand and started racing toward the road. "That's the time I guessed right," he said, as we reached the edge of the woods just in time to see two figures disappearing into the grove where Mr. Judson had left his car. "Look! They've got the box!"

He hurried me across the road to where we had left our car, and told me to jump in. Then he cranked the engine and carefully ran the car into the road, but Mr. Judson had already got under way, and was speeding up the road at a good pace. His car was speedy, but Arthur's is just as fast, so we had no trouble following him.

"I wonder where he's heading for now?" grumbled Arthur, as Mr. Judson turned into a crossroad.

"Maybe he's going to take the box to Philo Landis' place," I suggested, as we followed him and I recognized some of the landmarks.

"Guess you're right," admitted Arthur. "The old duffer lived a few

miles farther on. We'll get there almost as soon as Jake, unless something happens to the engine."

Arthur's prediction came true. As we drew up at the gate of Philo Landis' country residence we heard the engine of Mr. Judson's car purring up near the house. Arthur ran his car up the driveway as noiselessly as possible, and stopped it close to Mr. Judson's. After alighting, Arthur explored the tonneau of the other car. "Foiled again!" he exclaimed. "Guess they've taken the box inside. Let's investigate."

We made our way to the front porch, and cautiously looked through the big French windows into old Philo Landis' study, and the sight that I beheld was too comical for anything.

V.

THERE stood Mr. Judson, mopping his forehead with a big red bandanna handkerchief, while in the center of the floor there was a long box, on which was perched the most comical-looking little red-headed boy I have ever seen. "That must be Reds the Relentless," I gasped. "That's the little imp who referred to me as a 'skirt.'"

"Hush!" cautioned Arthur. "Judson is waiting for some one."

Arthur was right, for even as he spoke the door at the rear of the study opened and a figure stood framed in the doorway. I could have shrieked with fright, for the figure was none other than that of old Philo Landis, alive and in the flesh, with not a trace of chloroform showing anywhere on him. What in the world could it mean?

Old Philo Landis advanced into the room and shook hands with Mr. Judson. As he did so, he caught sight of Arthur and me peering through the window. Advancing, he threw it wide open. "Hello, Oliver!" he exclaimed.

"Good evening, Mrs. Oliver. You're just in time. Come in.

"You folks acquainted with Jake?" he asked, as we stepped into the room. "If that rascally nephew of mine were only here, the party would be complete. We've put one over on him. Haven't we, Jake?"

Mr. Judson grinned and showed his horrid teeth, while the funny little boy on the box puffed out his chest and exclaimed: "We sure has! They can't lose Jake and Reds the Relentless!"

"Say, everybody," questioned Arthur, "what's the answer, anyway? Dorothy overhears a conversation over the phone to the effect that Philo Landis has been chloroformed and is to be planted in Dorgan's woods. She tips Judson off, and he camps on the trail of the chloroformer. Then we camp on Judson's trail and follow him here with the box that has been snitched from Chester's car, and when we arrive here's Mr. Landis as chirp as a cricket and grinning like a canary-stuffed cat. What's in the box, anyway?"

"Sit down, folks," said Mr. Landis, "and I'll tell you all about it. When Chet and I had our flare-up about a big-noise ball player, Chet got as sore as a poisoned pup and fooled himself with the idea that he hated me most cordially.

"He brooded a lot over the matter, and, as a culminating stroke to show his contempt for me, he bought the scraggiest, scrawniest specimen of a dog he could lay his hands on and named it after your humble servant. He used to bring it out here and let it run loose in front of my place, calling it old Philo Landis and fooling himself with the idea that he was getting my goat. At first I used to sit back and laugh at the antics of Chet and my namesake, but as time wore on I began to realize how many varieties

of a fool Chet was making of himself, and I decided to take a hand in the matter.

"I sent for Jake, and I told him that I would give him fifty dollars if he would bring me the brute, living or dead, and it looks as though I'll have to cough up. How about it, Jake?"

"At's whatcha will, all right," shouted the ruby-headed relentless one, before Mr. Judson could make reply. "That chap Irwin nailed me on the street and got me to get this box for him. Then I helped him to put the mutt inside and fasten it up. He didn't know that he was playing into the hands of Reds the Relentless."

"I might state," remarked Mr. Judson, "that Mr. Irwin was perfectly justified in putting the brute out of the way. Lately it had developed a nasty streak, snapping and snarling at its master and at the children in the neighborhood. When you wised me to the conversation you had heard over the phone, Mrs. Oliver, I knew immediately that it was the dog Mr. Irwin had chloroformed, and I saw an easy way to cop the reward. The reason that I didn't put you wise to the situation was that I was afraid that you'd tip Mr. Irwin off and spoil my chances."

"Wasn't it ridiculous of me to jump at conclusions?" I exclaimed. "I should have known that Chester could never have been guilty of such a deed."

Dear old Philo Landis smiled. "When you see Chet, Mrs. Oliver," he said, "tell him that I was wrong about that baseball misfit from the bushes. Tell him I want him to come and see me."

"I certainly shall," I replied. "Come, Arthur, we must be going. Do not neglect to call on us when in town, dear Mr. Landis. The Fairview Apartments."

As I shook hands with the dear old

man, I heard that terrible Reds the Relentless mutter: "It's the skirt!" Aren't boys impudent?

A Wonderful Feat

THAT snails can pass over such sharp instruments as a razor's edge without the slightest harm has been demonstrated by a French scientist. The snail walks with the whole under surface of its body, and it is provided with a means to lubricate the road on which it travels. A peculiarly complex system of muscles enables it to cling in any position to the smoothest objects.

In lifting itself over the razor's edge it clings with the hind part of its walking surface to one side of the blade and extends the fore part and bends it down over the other side. Then it draws itself over gradually and without exerting any pressure upon the edge of the blade. It could not, however, crawl along the sharp edge of a razor or knife.

It is a fact that, while the common snail has lungs, heart, and a general circulation, being in every respect an air-breathing creature, it is, nevertheless, able to live indefinitely without inhaling the least bit of air. Experiments have clearly demonstrated that any or all of the usual life conditions may be removed in the case of the snail without terminating its existence or indeed impairing its functions.

The snail retreats into its shell on the approach of frosty weather, and causes the opening or mouth of its shell to be hermetically sealed by a secretion of silky texture absolutely impervious to air and water. In this condition, therefore, it is plain that the little creature is deprived of three of the four elements of life—air, water, and nourishment.

A Camera Chap Tale

Mightier Than the Pen

By

Eugene A. Clancy



CHAPTER I.

A HINT OF BIG THINGS.

THE sun was beginning to cast long shadows in the studio yard at Fort Lee. Arthur B. Haggin, the owner, manager, and inspiration of the Climax Film Company, had been interviewing people and doing a hundred other things since nine in the morning, but, unlike the majority of his fellow workers, he was still smiling and unruffled.

Behind his smiling exterior, however, trouble and anxiety were seething. The Climax was a new venture; it was all Haggin's, and he was a young and new figure in the moving-picture world. The big magnates of filmdom were trying to gobble him up, and Haggin was resolved not to be gobbled, if he could prevent it. But he was badly in need of money; he wanted sixty thousand dollars to tide him over until the returns from the next big feature on which the whole plant was working

should come in. The banks were snappy about lending money to new picture concerns, and just at that time there was a grim and special reason why the banks were turning down such requests right and left and clamping the lid on their assets.

The storm clouds of war were settling low over the land. The threatened conflict with one of the great belligerent European powers seemed to be inevitable; the actual declaration of war was expected daily, hourly. It was a bad time for everybody, let alone picture men.

Haggin looked at his watch. His work was finished for the day, and it was past his usual time for leaving the studio, but he was waiting for his friend Hawley, the star photographer of the New York *Sentinel*, on which Haggin had worked as a reporter before his successful plunge into moving pictures. Hawley had telephoned in the morning to say that he would come over to the studio at four o'clock, but, characteristically, the famous "Camera

Chap" had rung off without stating the why and wherefore of his coming. He had requested merely that Haggin wait for him without fail; a request which was quite unnecessary, for his former comrade of Park Row would have cheerfully closed up the Climax plant at a word from Frank Hawley.

Besides, there had been a certain note in the Camera Chap's voice over the wire, something that gave Haggin the impression that his friend's visit was not to be an idle call on an old pal, but that something of importance lay behind it.

It was nearly five o'clock when Haggin, standing at his office window and gazing down into the studio yard with its motley crowd of extras, saw the familiar figure of the Camera Chap coming briskly through the gate, his slim, athletic form incased in an automobile duster, a cap thrust on the back of his head. A few minutes later he was seated beside Haggin's desk, his keen, whimsical blue eyes seemingly intent on nothing more important than the smoke from a freshly lighted cigar.

"Well," said Haggin, looking at the other with a twinkle of amusement, "what's on your mind, Frank? I can see that you didn't come over here merely to invite me out to dinner. You look highly mysterious, like a man bursting with great tidings."

Hawley laughed. "You've hit it, old scout," he replied; "I'm over here for a very special reason. I'm on an assignment, and I'm convinced that it's the biggest assignment that ever came my way, or anybody else's way; but the funny part of it is that I haven't the faintest idea what the job really is."

"What!" exclaimed Haggin. "The famous Camera Chap working on an assignment without knowing the nature of it? Nonsense!"

"I suppose it does sound a little that way," Hawley replied, "but it's the fact. A newspaper man generally knows

what he is after, but this time I'm really in the dark. You see, this assignment does not come from the *Sentinel*—it's a government job."

He paused, and Haggin made no immediate comment. He was aware that the Camera Chap was not unknown in Washington; that on several occasions in the past the government had called on him to do some important work. Now Haggin looked at the man interestedly, expectantly. "Let's have it, Frank," he said, at length. "I'm all het up to know just where I come in on a job that you claim to know nothing about."

Suddenly Hawley stopped gazing at his cigar smoke and became the keen, alert man of action—the man who had turned Park Row upside down time and time again. "Here's the thing as I got it," he began. "This morning I got a phone call from Congressman Clark asking me to come and see him at once at the Mammoth Hotel. As soon as I arrived, he took me up to his room, telling me that he had sent for me on a matter of the utmost importance and secrecy. Clark stated that the administration wished to employ the services of a newspaper man and a photographer, and that I had been chosen. I've done a few bits of work for them in the past, you know, and I suppose he remembered me. Well, be that as it may, Clark went on to say that he was acting only as messenger boy; that he had been sent to me by Senator John C. Burton—yes, old Burton, former leader of the House—to whom the government has intrusted the performance of this bit of work, whatever it is. I do not know Burton personally, as I have not been in Washington since his arrival there, but I suppose some good friend spoke for me.

"Friend congressman," Hawley went on, "after stating that he was himself in the dark as to what I was expected to do, delivered Burton's message. It

seems that the government wants some moving pictures taken. I am given a hint that there may be a great big news story in connection with the pictures, but the story may not break for a month or six weeks, if it breaks at all. The pictures are to be taken within ten days, and that is my immediate assignment—to take those pictures. Burton said a lot of things about me, which modesty forbids my repeating. Suffice it to say, that I have the job.

"I don't know what the pictures are to be," Hawley continued, "or where they are to be taken. I'm simply to keep my mouth shut tight, know nothing, and be willing to know nothing, and be ready to carry a motion camera somewhere when I get a wire from Washington. It's something big, Artie, old scout; it's got my blood tingling. Whatever it is, it's electric with the urge of great events; don't you catch the spark yourself?"

It was true. That indefinable something that thrills men had the Climax man in its grip. "Jove!" he exclaimed, as the two men looked at each other. "I feel that you're right, Frank! Now, tell me where I come in."

"That's very simple," Hawley answered. "Last week you shed tears all over my apartment and told me how hard up you were. Well, I'm assured that there will be a fortune in these pictures, and they are to be my sole property—that is to be part of my compensation for services rendered. Now, old man, as the spectacle of you shedding tears annoys me, I shall turn those pictures over to the Climax Film Company; I am permitted to do that, it seems. Then, when your eyes are dry and have a wealthy light in them, you can pay me three or four million dollars royalty.

"Better keep that thank-you stuff under cover for a while," Hawley continued, interrupting a burst of words

from the other. "We may be grinding an empty camera. And speaking of grinding brings me back to the immediate and obvious reason for my trotting over here. I've got to do this job all by myself, I'm told, and I'm a little out of practice—haven't ground a movie camera for several months. Will you let me potter around the studio here for a few days and play with a camera?"

"Let you!" Haggin exclaimed. "Lord, man, the shop's yours! Why not do some actual taking? The best thing you can do is to grind the scenes in the feature we're working on now. It will be splendid practice! Get over at nine sharp to-morrow and I'll put you to work, and if you make good at——"

"Fine!" said Hawley, laughing, as he rose to go. "I'll be here. I must chase back to town now and wire Burton that he can shoot when he pleases."

"By the way, Frank," said Haggin, as he stood outside the gate, watching the Camera Chap getting ready to start his runabout, "are you sure Park Row has no inkling of this? If it is as big as you believe it is, it strikes me we can't be too careful. There are sharp eyes and ears down there, and any move the Camera Chap makes receives special attention—particularly in a certain quarter. Guess you know who I mean. He'd sell his soul to be in on this!"

Hawley sat up straight, a slight frown on his face, his hands tensely gripping the steering wheel. "I know," he said quietly; "but so far, I think the thing is air-tight."

"But Gale has an uncanny way of getting on to things," said Haggin.

"Well, he'll have to do some tall guessing this time, won't he?" The Camera Chap grinned, pulled down his cap, and started the little car. "See you in the morning, old man!"

CHAPTER II.

LINKING UP FACTS.

THE man of whom the Camera Chap and Haggin had spoken at the end of their interview was well worth the serious consideration they seemed disposed to accord him. Gale, who, as a reporter, assisted by a camera man, had often given Hawley a hard fight, had now become a photographer himself, and was the *Daily News'* star in that line. He was clever, but experienced newspaper men knew him to be the type of man who would "sell his soul" for a scoop, and that was wherein he had so far failed to win the Camera Chap's laurels. When working on an assignment, no man could trust Gale; he would go to any dubious lengths and stoop to any trick to win out. Hawley played many a trick himself, but his game was always legitimate; he never hesitated to draw the line at anything which savored of the dishonorable.

As Hawley drove his car through the village of Fort Lee, on the way to the ferry to Manhattan, he dismissed Gale from his thoughts. He could not see how Gale or any one else possibly could have any knowledge of what was in the wind, especially since he himself knew next to nothing. Congressman Clark had assured him positively that at the present moment only four men in Washington had knowledge of it: two high officials, who knew the whole secret, Senator Burton and the congressman himself, who knew only what he had told Hawley—that some pictures were to be taken.

That morning Gale, finding nothing for him to do, had been idling about the office and finally strolled into the city room in search of some reporter with whom to go out and have lunch.

"Come along uptown with me," said Billy Atwood, "and I'll blow you to

lunch at the Mammoth. Going up there to try to squeeze half a column about the war out of Congressman Clark."

Gale agreed readily, and left word at the office where he was going, so that if wanted he could be found. He rode uptown chatting and idly wondering what good things the Mammoth had to eat. He had no interest in congressmen; they were good pickings for reporters, but of little use to photographers.

But from the instant the pair stepped into the crowded lobby of the hotel, Gale began to develop an interest in congressmen. His sharp eyes had at once spotted Hawley and Clark stepping into an elevator, and the eternal question leaped into his mind: What was the Camera Chap doing? Atwood had not seen the incident, and Gale did not enlighten him, but dropped into a chair while the other went to the desk. In a few minutes the reporter returned with the information that Clark was engaged and could not be seen for at least an hour.

"Billy," said Gale, "I've just spotted something in my line. Do me a favor, old man, will you? Beat it away from me and stay away. You don't know I exist. See?"

The reporter, who was young and inexperienced and regarded Gale as a personage and a power, nodded. "I get you," he said. "I'm going to get something to eat and tackle his nibs later. So long, and good luck!"

Left to himself, Gale retired to the rear of the lobby and sat down there to watch the elevators from behind a newspaper. It was not long before he saw Hawley emerge and walk toward the telephone desk. Quickly Gale followed. There were several people around the operator's desk, and Gale resolved to take a daring chance. As the Camera Chap leaned over the desk

and gave his number to the girl, Gale stood directly behind him.

"Three-seven-four Fort Lee," said Hawley.

A few minutes later Gale emerged from a side entrance to the hotel and walked down the street. He was a little disgusted to find that Hawley's call had been to Fort Lee, the moving-picture city. Every one on Park Row knew that Hawley and Haggin were close friends, and it was not difficult for Gale to guess that the call had been to the Climax studio. To make sure, however, he stepped into a drug store, called the number himself, and verified the fact.

This news, however, was very unsatisfactory to the *Daily News* man; it looked as if he were on a dead trail, after all. Congressman Clark was a personal friend of the Camera Chap, and Hawley's visit might have been merely a friendly call, and the telephone message to Haggin easily might be explained on the same basis. Was there some connecting link between the two facts, and, if there were, did it hold any special significance?

Gale could not see anything in it, and was beginning to think that he was wasting a lot of time and trouble over nothing. Still, one little thing stuck in his mind: the telephone call to Haggin had followed immediately on an evidently confidential talk with Clark. Gale's highly trained, oversuspicious mind clung to that. It was one of those far-fetched possibilities the careful investigation of which had won for him the reputation of having seemingly uncanny insight. Having nothing else to do, he decided to devote the rest of the day to such an investigation.

In the game that the *Daily News* man now began to play, much depended on moving in such a manner that no hint that he was being trailed should be conveyed to the other man. Accord-

ingly Gale proceeded with great care. After three days of his peculiar and devious sleuthing he felt assured that he was not wasting his time, and that the Camera Chap was on some assignment; naturally it must be an important one, for Hawley went after only the big things.

Without much trouble Gale learned that Hawley was not putting in a daily appearance at the *Sentinel* office and was not expected there for three or four weeks. Where was he? Gale thought of Washington. Congressman Clark had returned to the capital and had made no secret of the fact. Replies to messages to the Washington correspondent of the *Daily News* assured Gale that Hawley was not there.

Then Gale sent a man up to watch the Amsterdam Garage, where he knew Hawley kept the natty little runabout which he used almost daily. On the evening of the fourth day Gale had the secret of the little car's daily trips. At once he sought the office of the *Daily News* managing editor. "Evans," he said, "I've got a hunch the battle is on again—Frank Hawley's got something up his sleeve."

"What's the game?" asked Evans.

Gale told what little he knew. Evans did not seem to be much impressed. "Looks to me as if you've been going to the melodramatic movies too much, Gale," he said, "but go ahead and enjoy yourself! And, for Heaven's sake, man, if there should be anything doing, don't let Hawley beat you to it this time. I'm getting tired of having that *Sentinel* wonder make a spectacle of us!"

The managing editor leaned back and glared, and it must be said for Gale that he returned the glare with right good will, eye for eye. Then, without another word, he strolled out of the sanctum and a few minutes later left the building.

CHAPTER III.

AS THE CRANK TURNED.

AT nine o'clock on the morning after his interview with Haggin, the Camera Chap drove his runabout through the Climax gate and parked it in the studio yard. As Haggin had not yet put in an appearance, Hawley sat down on the running board of his car and idly watched the small army of motion-picture folk dribbling in through the gate. He knew many of them and waved a greeting, now and then exchanging a bantering word.

Suddenly he stood up with an exclamation as his gaze fell on a girl who had just come in alone, walking in a brisk, businesslike way. She was small and very pretty, dressed in a neat blue suit, her brown hair curling under a soft hat. The Camera Chap stepped forward quickly and fell in beside her. "Good morning, Miss Santley," he said.

The girl stopped short and looked up at him, a funny expression of consternation and dismay on her face. "Mr. Hawley!" she exclaimed, with a gasp. "G-good morning."

Hawley grinned down at her. "Discovered!" he said melodramatically. "So this is the explanation of Miss Santley's sudden disappearance from the staff of the *Sentinel*. The lure of the films!"

The girl now had recovered her self-possession, and she could not help laughing. "Yes," she said frankly, "I'm fairly caught; but, please, Mr. Hawley, you must promise not to tell! You see, I never really wanted to be a writer—I wanted to be an actress. Yes, a really, truly, moving-picture actress! So I came over here and worked as an extra, and now I've got a regular part."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" asked Hawley. "You knew that Haggin was a friend of mine and that I could get you——"

"I knew that," the girl interrupted,

"but I didn't want to use influence. I wanted to get a job all by myself. I believe people think more of you if you try to get on by your own unaided efforts. I don't want any one to know until I make good. And please do not mention me to Mr. Haggin. He has spoken well of my work, and I just couldn't bear to have him think that I am pulling wires, as so many people do. Perhaps that sounds silly, but that's the way I feel. This is my first picture, and when it is released—well, then you can say anything you like."

Hawley joined in her laugh, but there was an earnest light in his eyes as he spoke. "I'm going to see that picture, Miss Santley; but I promise not to say a word until then; not even to Haggin. You have the right idea about things, and you are going to be a success all on your own."

"Thank you," she said, putting out her hand. "I must hurry now; I'm in a number of scenes this morning. If you come into the studio, please don't laugh when you see me!"

With a nod and a smile she trotted off, leaving the Camera Chap looking after her a little wistfully. Then he turned and strolled toward the gate, through which the Climax chief had just entered.

"Frank," said Haggin, motioning toward the runabout, "do you think it wise to be parading that little bus just at present?"

The Camera Chap smiled. "Oh, that's all right," he said carelessly. "No need of that under-cover stuff until we get close to the firing line."

The two men proceeded at once to the office. "Well," asked Haggin, when they were seated, "anything new to report?"

"Yes," replied Hawley. "Early this morning, in response to my telegram of acceptance, I received a wire from Burton giving us a little more informa-

tion, such as it is. It seems that I may not be wanted for at least two weeks, but I am to hold myself in readiness against an instant summons. The senator must have got himself coached in moving-picture technicalities, for he says I am to have ready two thousand feet of film and a duplicate roll of the same amount. I wonder what that duplicate stuff means? The pictures are to be taken at sea, under ordinary daylight conditions."

"Taken at sea!" exclaimed Haggin. "What do you make of that?"

"Search me!" Hawley replied, a little irritably. "I've accepted the condition of blissful ignorance, and I'm going to stick to it cheerfully. Now, stack me up against this great Climax master film that you are working on. I'm just in the mood to crab your star's best scenes and spoil about a thousand feet of thrilling drama!"

Laughing, Haggin led the way into the crowded studio, and in a few minutes Hawley was hand in glove with camera men and directors. One of the latter kindly introduced Hawley to Miss Santley, who happened to be working in the scene then receiving attention. Secretly laughing over their little joke, the pair pleasantly shook hands and exchanged a few casual words.

The following day Hawley was doing actual work, grinding in scene after scene of the Climax's big feature. The regular camera man was enjoying an unexpected vacation; directors and actors were both amused and flattered to have the capable and famous newspaper man working with them, though they were puzzled when they found him keeping at it, day after day. Hawley lightly turned aside any direct questions, and the studio folk good-naturedly took the hint.

The feature picture on which they were working called for a number of scenes in foreign countries. One of

these was supposed to be in Calcutta, India, where Miss Santley, as an American girl tourist, stopped in front of a street bazaar to purchase a curio. The bazaar keeper sat behind his stall, and half a dozen natives squatted around him.

Hawley had been at the studio five or six days when this scene was ready to be taken. The small but faithful and colorful setting had been built in a corner of the studio. Hawley set up his camera, ready to "shoot," meanwhile chatting with Miss Santley, while the director gave his instructions to the six extras and implored them to "act natural" and try to remember that they were poor, hopeless, helpless scum of the Orient and not six little Willie Harts.

At last all was ready and Hawley began to grind. Miss Santley stepped into the scene. As instructed, the natives looked up at her and turned to one another, gesturing. It was then that a peculiar light flashed into Hawley's eyes, and, for an instant, it looked as if he were going to stop grinding and have a good laugh; but he went on turning the crank until the scene was finished.

The moment the scene was over Hawley stepped forward and held out his hand to one of the picturesque "natives." "Hello, Gale," he said, in a tone of cheerful banter. "Congratulations! Some make-up, and your acting was splendid! You make a wonderful Indian—but I wouldn't wear that seal ring of yours, if I were you; it doesn't go with the character."

CHAPTER IV.

COMPLIMENTS EXCHANGED.

WHEN Hawley addressed him by name, the "native" scarcely had been able to repress a start of surprise and evident chagrin. However, Gale recovered his self-possession quickly,

and, knowing from past experience that his present little game was up, he proceeded to make the best of things with his usual cleverness.

He shook hands laughingly, an amiable grin appearing through his elaborate Oriental make-up. "Caught!" he exclaimed, echoing Hawley's bantering tone. "Jove, Hawley, you're a sharp one! Quite a coincidence, our being over here together, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Hawley, smiling; "quite a coincidence—like your listening to me in the Mammoth Hotel a few days ago."

Gale laughed frankly; he knew that there was nothing to be gained by denial. In fact, both men knew from former clashes that for the moment it was a case of cards on the table, and neither of them made any show of hesitation about "producing."

"Thought I got away with that little stunt, old man," said Gale. "Wonder how you got on? Surely you did not see me——"

"Perhaps," broke in Hawley, "I have a friend or two around the Mammoth. But why this delightful attention, Gale? I hate to see you all mussed up like that just to take a peek at me grinding film."

Though smiling, the two men eyed each other keenly. Miss Santley, the director, and the others were listening curiously to the unexpected, and, to them, mystifying battle of wits. "Tut, tut!" said Gale humorously. "Don't make me blush for my motives, Hawley; really, you wrong me! To tell you the truth, I've a dark secret; I'm trying to write a little movie yarn, and I thought a little genuine atmosphere, with the famous Camera Chap as the hero——"

Hawley laughed heartily. "Good stuff, Gale!" he said. "Splendid!"

Gale grinned as he moved away. "Well," he said, "I think I'll run along. I've acquired all the atmosphere I shall

need—for the present. So long, old man."

He walked off through the studio with seeming nonchalance, but under his Indian make-up he was fuming. He had been getting away with the scheme he had planned; but he had overlooked that confounded ring! Now he would have to abandon this plan just as it had begun to work; and he had found out nothing. Why on earth was Hawley grinding Climax pictures day after day? Undoubtedly there was something behind it, but what could it be?

Having removed his make-up and got into his own clothes, Gale left the studio. As he walked across the yard, he glanced up at the windows and found himself meeting the eyes of the pretty girl in whose scene he just had been working. It was not at all likely that she would recognize him, as she had seen him only in his make-up, but he waved his hat gallantly. Good-naturedly Miss Santley returned the greeting. Though she did not recognize him as the erstwhile Oriental, she looked after him with a puzzled expression.

Gale had gone on only a few steps when a similar puzzled expression crossed his face. He turned quickly and looked up at the window, but the girl had disappeared. Frowning and feeling thoroughly disgusted with himself, he resumed his stride and passed through the gate.

CHAPTER V.

MORE THAN ONE PLAY.

THE tilt between Hawley and Gale naturally was a subject of gossip and speculation among the studio folk for the rest of the day. Haggin and Miss Santley, however, were the only ones who knew the real meaning of it. While Hawley was known to probably half the Climax force, Gale was unknown to any of them.

"Frank," said Haggin, as he and the Camera Chap were consuming a hurried lunch in the office, "you've got to hand it to him—that was a pretty nifty idea of his. But why did you let him know that you were on? It would have been a good joke to keep him slaving another week—only to find that he was as wise in the end as in the beginning."

"He's a dangerous proposition to monkey with that way," Hawley replied. "How long was he here; do you know?"

"Yes; I investigated at once, of course. He came over bright and early yesterday and mingled with the crowd of extras in the yard. You can bet he did not have much difficulty in persuading Ben Clare to give him a job. I wonder what direction his next drive will take?"

"I don't know," said Hawley, "but we'll have to be on our guard against all sorts of bombs and nets. I wish he wasn't wise to that interview I had with Clark."

"Well, that can't be helped now," said Haggin, getting up and putting on his hat. "I'm off for the day—got a lot of appointments over in town. Don't overwork yourself—and don't be casting such sheep's eyes at little Miss Santley."

"Eh?" said the Camera Chap, sitting up and flushing. But Haggin was gone, leaving the echo of a laugh behind him.

Hawley went back into the studio, arranged his camera, and began grinding the emotional scenes of the Climax's star actress. But as he worked, his eyes, despite Haggin's warning, frequently wandered to the far end of the studio where a small, brown-haired girl was busily registering reels of love and happiness before another camera operated by an unfeeling wretch in overalls, whose mind was concerned only with footage.

When work for the day was finished, the Camera Chap still lingered around the deserted studio. Though he would not admit it to himself, he knew very well why he was lingering. At last the reason for this apparently aimless delay appeared, hurrying toward the door which led out to the yard. The reason was attired in a neat blue suit.

"Miss Santley," Hawley said, catching up with her as she stepped into the yard, "may I take you over the ferry?" He motioned to the runabout.

"What!" she exclaimed, her eyes dancing. "In that funny little thing? Can it really go with two?"

"Suppose we try it and see?" he suggested, smiling.

"All right; I'll risk it," she replied.

In a few minutes the little car was satisfactorily proving that it could hold two very comfortably and at the same time acquit itself favorably in the matter of going. "Mr. Hawley," asked the girl, as they drove slowly through the village of Fort Lee, "was that man really Mr. Gale of the *Daily News*, the man who was always trying to scoop you when I was on the *Sentinel*?"

"Yes," replied Hawley; "most certainly that was Gale. But surely you knew him? I thought any one who had been in Park Row for any length of time would know Gale."

"Oh, I knew of him, of course," she answered; "but I never met him or saw him, to my knowledge, when I was on the *Sentinel*. To-day, though, his face did look familiar. I purposely got a look at him when he was leaving. I'm sure I've seen him recently, but I can't think where. You—you caught him at something to-day, didn't you? Please do not think I'm trying to pry into your affairs, Mr. Hawley, but to one who has worked in Park Row the thing was rather obvious. And I must say you—well, you did it very nicely."

"Thank you!" said Hawley, laughing. "Of course it would be ridiculous

to try to hide from an ex-newspaper girl the fact that I have an object in being over here. Gale thinks I have some assignment up my sleeve, and he's making every effort to find out what it is."

"I hope you scoop him good!" exclaimed Miss Santley abruptly.

Hawley stole a glance at her, but she was looking straight ahead. "It's nice of you to say that," he said; "but why?"

"Oh, just because!"

Knowing by that lucid statement that he had run into a sort of feminine blind alley, wisely Hawley shifted the conversation to other things.

By this time the little car was being ferried across the Hudson. "Where am I to take you?" he asked, as they neared the Manhattan shore.

"Only to the subway station," the girl replied. "Mother and I are camping out in a funny little hotel just off Washington Square, the Marshall. It's miles and miles downtown, you know."

"Well," he replied, "I believe this bus can make it. I'm going to take you home."

She protested vigorously, but in the end Hawley won out and for Washington Square they started. On the way down Fifth Avenue Miss Santley confessed that she had a great secret; she had written a moving-picture play. Hawley, of course, showed tremendous interest. The upshot of it was that the Camera Chap was invited to call that evening, read the play, and pass judgment.

He drove the runabout uptown and left it in the garage. After dinner he took the subway and returned to the Marshall and presented himself at the Santley apartment on the third floor. He was introduced to a small, bright-faced woman who looked more like Miss Santley's elder sister than her mother.

"So this is the Camera Chap him-

self!" said Mrs. Santley pleasantly, when they were seated. "Ruth often spoke of you when she was on the *Sentinel*, and she has told me about your finding an old rival spying on you in the studio to-day. You must find life very exciting, Mr. Hawley! Now, please tell me all about Ruth's acting. She won't let even her own mother visit the studio, Mr. Hawley! She says I must wait until the wonderful picture is shown in the theaters and then she will take me to see it."

Immediately Hawley plunged into a eulogy of Miss Santley's talents, but Ruth threatening in mock despair to put on her hat and go out, he was forced to desist. After a little general conversation, the play was brought out and Hawley settled back to listen while the girl read.

It must be confessed that the Camera Chap was not so much interested in the play as he was in the pretty picture the author made, curled up boyishly in a big chair as she read. It entered Hawley's mind that he would like to spend many such delightful evenings. Park Row, Washington, Gale, and all else were forgotten.

"My! Is it really so bad as that? You look as if you were enjoying a quiet snooze, Mr. Critic!"

Brought back to earth, Hawley realized that the girl had put down the manuscript and was looking at him, awaiting his comment. Immediately he set about retrieving himself, and soon they were deep in an animated discussion of scenes, characters, and motives, while Mrs. Santley listened interestedly.

With the idea that had entered his mind still uppermost, the Camera Chap cleverly and unblushingly led Miss Santley to agree to the fact that there was a great deal of revision and working over necessary, work in which really he should join her. He had a number of suggestions; ideas for making cer-

tain scenes more effective. She really must let him undertake the work with her, and later on she must let him submit the play to Haggin.

Ruth was carried away by his energy and enthusiasm. "I wonder," she said hesitatingly, as he rose to go, "if you could come again soon? I know you have so many things to do, Mr. Hawley, but I want to get to work on those new scenes at once! Do—do you think you could come to-morrow evening, or maybe——"

"I'll be here to-morrow evening at eight-thirty, Miss Santley," replied the Camera Chap, as he pocketed his notebook and pencil. "We're going to work like Trojans!"

As Hawley left the hotel, he did not see two men idly smoking cigars in a doorway across the street. The men parted company; one followed the Camera Chap, while the other strolled over, and, after looking through the door as if to make sure the small lobby was deserted, entered the Marshall.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE SHOCK OF A CRISIS.

ANOTHER week went by without any word from Washington, and the delay in receiving the expected wire from Senator Burton was getting on the Camera Chap's nerves. Naturally high strung, he was always on edge when there was an important assignment ahead of him. Now, feeling that some big, smashing story was about to break, he was especially restless. This waiting in complete ignorance of the nature of the story was intolerable.

While waiting, he had become a nightly visitor at the Marshall. His reason for doing this was not altogether sentimental. He found that the two hours or so he spent in the delightful and congenial company of Miss Santley were an admirable foil for his restlessness, the nervous tension that

had him in its grip. Perhaps the girl, out of her newspaper experience and kindly nature, divined this, for tactfully she strove to divert his mind by making him really work hard on the play.

There seemed no danger of his being caught napping by this nightly diversion. He had told Ruth and her mother that he was expecting a wire from Washington. The operator in his own apartment house had instructions to pass on to the Marshall any telephone messages, and, should a telegram arrive shortly after Hawley left home, it was to be sent to the Marshall immediately. The *Sentinel* office also knew where he was to be found.

Hawley was no longer making daily visits to the Climax studio, there being no need. He had film and camera ready in his apartment. Apparently Gale had dropped off the trail after his being discovered in the studio. All in all, Hawley believed that his visiting the Santleys was a good diplomatic move. It was likely to puzzle Gale, if he knew of it, and, perhaps, the *Daily News* man would get the notion that sentiment was dulling the Camera Chap's wits.

One evening, in that second week of waiting, Hawley left his apartment, walked to the subway, and rode down to the Marshall as usual. But to-night his thoughts were not of Miss Santley or plays. He was thinking of the same thing of which every man and woman in the country was thinking. The war clouds which had been low over the land for months were now especially heavy and black, blotting out all else. The headlines of the evening papers were screaming the solemn tidings that the last hope of arbitration, of peace, seemed gone. The final break with the great foreign power and the formal declaration of war were expected within the week.

As Hawley walked toward the Marshall a thought flashed into his mind,

a thought that set his blood tingling. Could it be that this secret government assignment had something to do with the international situation? It did not seem possible, but the newspaper man's eyes flashed at the prospect. It would not be the first time that the Camera Chap had played a useful part on the stage of big events.

Turning into the Marshall, he forced his mind back to the immediate business of the evening. He found Mrs. Santley reading the newspaper headlines with a grave, anxious face. Though her husband was dead and she had no son, no doubt she was thinking much the same as were countless other women that night. Ruth, too, was subdued and thoughtful. Her mind was not on her play. At last she got up, pushed aside the manuscript, and began to pace restlessly about the room. "I can't work on that thing to-night," she said, a fine, serious light in her brown eyes. "It does not seem right."

Probably the same scene was being enacted in a million homes. The first shock of the great crisis made thoughtful people feel very small and helpless. Hawley felt it as much as the two women, but many times he had been in the thick of such things; he knew that the panicky feeling would be only temporary; that one must soon accept the dread facts and face them with the ordinary everyday cheerfulness of normal human nature. Accordingly he set to work to enliven the girl and her mother. Something he said made Ruth laugh and she came back to the table. "It does seem wrong to be bothering with a silly play to-night," she said, "but I suppose we won't help anybody by just moaning and groaning."

Mrs. Santley picked up a magazine and had just begun to read a story when the telephone rang. She crossed the room to answer the call, while Ruth and Hawley looked up expectantly. "Yes," said Mrs. Santley, at the instru-

ment, "Mr. Hawley is here. A boy with a telegram? Please send him right up."

She hung up the receiver and turned smilingly to Hawley. "I suppose the long expected has happened," she said.

The Camera Chap pushed back his chair and sat waiting. Ruth clasped her hands, her eyes shining. The girl's thoughts were running in the same channel as Hawley's: If the telegram was from Washington, was it not possible that it had something to do with the national crisis?

The three people in the room heard quick footsteps along the corridor outside, but they paid no attention. They were waiting for the sound of the elevator stopping at their floor. In a moment they heard it. There followed the murmur of voices; then the sound of the elevator descending. A minute went by, but there came no knock on the door.

Suddenly Hawley sprang to his feet, crossed to the door, and opened it. There was no one outside. In an instant he was at the telephone. "This is Mr. Hawley," he said sharply into the instrument. "Where's that boy with a telegram for me?"

"Why," came the clerk's voice in reply, "he just delivered it to you, didn't he——"

"Is the boy there?" cried Hawley.

"Yes; just going out——"

"Hold him, hold him!" commanded Hawley. "I'm coming down!"

While Ruth and her mother stood trembling, bewildered, Hawley darted through the door, and, not waiting for the elevator, fairly hurled himself down the stairs to the little office. A messenger boy stood at the desk and looked up with frightened eyes. Hawley grabbed the boy's shoulder. "I'm Hawley," he said tensely. "Where's that telegram for me? Quick! What did you do with it?"

"I—I give it to—to a chap what—

what said his name was Hawley—up—up there on the th-third floor,” the boy managed to say. He was trembling and sobbing, for Hawley, now the savage man of action, was unconsciously frightening the lad out of his wits. The clerk behind the desk was under the Camera Chap’s influence, too, as his white face showed.

“What did he look like—where is he?” Hawley shot out. “Come, youngster,” he said more kindly, “I can see you’re not to blame—nothing’ll happen to you. Now, quick!”

“He went out two or three minutes ago,” said the boy, now speaking clearly and rapidly. “He runs inter me when I gets outer the elevator upstairs. ‘I’m Mr. Hawley,’ he says, ‘an’ I’m in a awful hurry—gimme the gram an’ I’ll sign fer it.’ An’ he grabs it, signs the book, an’ beats it down with me an’ goes rushin’ out. Honest, mister, he looked on the level. He’s a nice look-in’ chap with a gray, soft hat, black hair, an’ wearin’ them nose glasses and——”

“Gale!” exclaimed Hawley.

CHAPTER VII.

TO UNDO THE MISCHIEF.

DO you know that man who just went out?” Hawley asked, turning on the clerk.

“Yes,” replied that bewildered individual; “of course I know Mr. Gale. He’s living here——”

“How long has he been here? What apartment has he?” asked Hawley.

“Mr. Gale has been here about three weeks. He is on the third floor——”

Abruptly he stopped, for suddenly Ruth came flying out of the elevator, her face expressive of intense excitement. “Oh, Mr. Hawley,” she cried, “you’ve been tricked! I can see it—and I know how! When you ran out of the room,” she hurried on, her words tumbling over each other, “something

told mother to pull aside the curtain behind the sideboard—you know, the curtain that hides the door that connects with the next apartment when they want to make them into a suite. That door was open! Some one must have been listening and—and——”

She trailed off into trembling silence, for Hawley was looking at her with a keen, searching gaze. “Yes, Miss Santley,” he said quietly, “some one was listening—our friend Gale. It’s all very simple, and Gale has got away with it. You see, though you have never seen him, Gale lives here. Well, now to undo the mischief, if I can.”

As he turned to the wondering messenger an exclamation escaped the girl, an exclamation that rang true. “Oh,” she said, “now I know why his face seemed familiar that day. It was here that I saw him; I passed him in the lobby once or twice!” She paused, the hot blood rushing to her cheeks as a thought flashed into her mind—the Camera Chap suspected her! The whole thing told against her. How could he help suspecting her?

Suddenly she faced him, her small hands at her sides. “Mr. Hawley,” she said earnestly, “I know what you are thinking. You suspect that I——”

She did not finish, for again that keen, searching gaze was on her. But she looked up into his face and unwaveringly met the scrutiny. Then, as by magic, the Camera Chap’s face broke into his genial, humorous smile, and a light of mingled amusement and sympathy shone in his eyes. “Ruth,” he said, unconsciously using the name for the first time and putting his hands lightly on her shoulders, “you ought to be in tragedy instead of comedy. Forget it! Perhaps something like that did enter my noddle for half a second, but I’m subject to awful brain storms, you know!”

“Thank you,” she said, lowering her eyes.

"Now," he went on, "I'll run upstairs and get my hat, and then I'll be off. I've got my work cut out for me to-night. Mr. Clerk, get me a taxi!"

When Hawley returned to the lobby the cab was already at the door, and the still frightened and doubtful messenger boy was waiting. "I'll phone you in the morning, Miss Santley," he said, "and let you know how I make out. Just now we're off to the telegraph office to have a look at the duplicate of that telegram. Come on, boy!"

In the next second Hawley was out on the street and pushing the messenger into the cab. Ignoring the elevator, Ruth walked slowly up the stairs and into her apartment. Paying no attention to Mrs. Santley's eager questions, she swept aside the pages of her manuscript and buried her head in her arms on the table. "Oh, mother," she said at last, without looking up, "I just know he is on something big, something wonderful! And this had to happen—through me; and—and—he called me Ruth!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSIDERING THE SITUATION.

THE cab containing the Camera Chap and the frightened messenger boy shot away from the curb and swiftly ate up the few blocks intervening between the Hotel Marshall and the district telegraph office from which the boy came. Hawley's jaw was set grimly. Only one thought was in his mind: to get to the telegraph office. There was no use thinking or planning; there was nothing to be done until he knew what was in that message. The *Daily News* man had "put one over" with a vengeance!

Reaching the office, Hawley flung through the door, the boy at his heels. As the office was in the Camera Chap's own neighborhood and frequently patronized by him, the clerk immediately recognized him, and, when Haw-

ley explained the state of affairs, promptly brought out the file duplicate of the confiscated telegram.

Hawley drew it toward him across the desk, his eyes snapping. As he had expected and now feared, it was the long-awaited message from Washington. It was brief, but fatally definite now that Gale knew its contents. It was addressed to Hawley at his apartment and ran as follows:

Wanted at once; all ready. At nine o'clock to-morrow—Wednesday—morning cutter will be waiting for you at Pier No. 1, and will take you out to steamer *Golden Star* lying three miles off Sandy Hook. Giving you name and position of steamer as cutter was requisitioned in haste simultaneously with this wire and there might be hitch. Must reach steamer by noon. Week's trip at sea. Need bring nothing but camera and plenty of film. Burton on board.

CLARK, acting for Burton.

Though his eyes flashed with emotion, the Camera Chap made no word of comment. Calmly he took out his pad and fountain pen and proceeded to make a copy of the message. This done, he put the copy in his wallet and pushed the office duplicate over to the clerk. "All right, Edwards," he said quietly; "much obliged. That's all I want."

"Mr. Hawley," said the clerk, "I can only offer you our apologies for the blunder. Of course, this boy is fired for——"

"Hold on there!" said Hawley quickly. "I don't want the boy fired. As a personal favor to me I want you to keep him on. He had nothing to do with it; it was a rather natural blunder. Putting it over a poor messenger boy was easy as eating breakfast to the man who got that telegram. The kid's had his lesson, and I guess he's suffered enough. Here's a dollar, my lad—go out and stuff yourself and you'll feel better. So long, Edwards."

With a nod to the clerk and a grin

for the boy, who stood gaping at the bill in his hand, Hawley left the office, jumped into the cab which he had ordered to wait, and was driven to his apartment house. Entering his rooms, he sat down quietly at his reading table, and slowly filled a pipe. An observer would have said that the Camera Chap made a perfect picture of a man who had not a care in the world.

It was Hawley's way to face a crisis calmly; to gain complete control of himself before venturing a move. He called it getting the right perspective on a situation, declaring that a half hour alone with a pipe gave a man a fairly correct view of things.

He took out the copy of the telegram and studied it as he smoked. Resolved not to be caught a second time, he read and reread the message. He wanted to make sure that there was nothing in it on which Gale could act before morning. That mention of a cutter was all that held any possibility of such action. Luckily the boat's name was not given, but Gale might make an effort to discover its identity and get in touch with it.

After meditating this point for a little while, Hawley dismissed it. Gale would have to be cautious in seeking any such information, and it was unlikely that mysterious inquiries concerning the unknown cutter would be answered. At last he put down the bit of paper, confident that the *Daily News* man could find nothing in it to suggest any move other than that of waiting for the appearance of the cutter at the Battery in the morning.

Really he had felt sure of this conclusion when he first read the file copy in the telegraph office, and that was why he had not done at once what might seem the obvious thing to do—notify Washington. There was no need of unnecessarily alarming Clark or Burton, and the Camera Chap could see no occasion for such action. He believed

he could handle Gale without upsetting plans.

Hawley rose and began to stroll about the room. Gradually a smile spread over his face, and he chuckled. The more he thrashed over the situation, the less critical it appeared. It began to look as if Gale, in capturing the precious telegram, had succeeded in acquiring only the proverbial white elephant. True, the man had gained some possibly valuable information; he knew in what direction Hawley's assignment lay; but what could Gale do about it? He had only one obvious and futile move left.

That move, of course, would be to attempt to get aboard the cutter; a move which Gale was likely to undertake in much the same fashion as he had got into the Climax studio. Then a thought flashed on Hawley and his hands clenched: Suppose Gale, thinking the game was up so far as his scooping the Camera Chap was concerned, should give what information he had to the *Daily News*, and thus give the reporters a tip that something was in the wind. Then he smiled. Gale might do it, but not yet; not until his last chance was gone, and that would not be until after nine o'clock in the morning.

Deciding that there was nothing to be done that night, the Camera Chap looked at his watch. It was after twelve. Hunting up a suit case, he threw into it a few necessities, meanwhile whistling cheerfully. Leaving a call for seven o'clock, he went to bed and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE MEGAPHONE.

A LITTLE after eight the following morning, Hawley was sitting on the bulkhead platform of Pier No. 1, his suit case, motion camera, and film beside him. There was no sign of the

cutter as yet, nor had Gale put himself in evidence openly or otherwise. There were a number of people on the pier, but, beyond casting curious glances at the motion camera, they paid no attention to Hawley. He gave each person a keen scrutiny, and little on the pier or river escaped his watchful eyes, but he saw nothing even remotely suggesting the *Daily News* man.

An excursion boat blundered up to the gangway, receiving its waiting passengers, and blundered off. Hawley was glad to find that the departure of the boat left him alone on the pier. It was close to nine, and he was scanning the river and bay anxiously. Five minutes later he caught sight of a little craft that he instantly recognized as a revenue cutter nosing up the bay from the direction of Staten Island. It came on steadily, and evidently was making for Pier No. 1. In a short time it was bobbing under the gangway.

An iron-gray, middle-aged man in an officer's uniform swung onto the pier, climbed to the bulkhead platform, and glanced about him expectantly. The Camera Chap stepped forward. "If you're looking for Frank Hawley," he said, "I'm your man."

The officer eyed him keenly, and his gaze took in the camera. "Yes," he said, "I'm ordered to pick up Mr. Frank Hawley, but you have a telegram to show me, haven't you?"

"I'm sorry," Hawley replied, meeting the other's gaze steadily, "but I haven't got the telegram itself with me. Here is a copy of it, however, and a card and letter that will identify me."

The officer took the documents with an expression of frowning surprise. "Yes," he said, "this is a copy of the telegram, but why haven't you the original? This is an important matter, and I was not prepared for any hitch of this sort."

"If you don't mind," Hawley answered smilingly, "I prefer to reserve

my explanation for Senator Burton when you put me on board the *Golden Star*. If you have any doubts as to my identity, you can settle them in ten minutes by coming up to Park Row with me. But I strongly advise you to take a chance on me and get me away from here at once. I have good reason to suspect that we are being watched, and, if we don't get away immediately, a real hitch and perhaps a fatal one may occur."

There was a pause, during which the two men exchanged searching glances. Hawley could see that he was dealing with a methodical, unimaginative slave of red tape, a man who frowned on any irregularity, however trifling. The Camera Chap guessed that the cutter had received the briefest instructions.

"Well," said the officer at length, in the irritated tone peculiar to men of his type, "there is no time to waste, and I suppose there is nothing else for me to do but take you at your word. Come aboard."

"Thanks," said Hawley, gathering up his things and following the officer down the gangway. "Has any one tried to get in touch with you since you received the order to pick me up?"

"No," replied the officer. "Haven't heard a word since we got the order last night. And now I'd like to know what you meant by saying that we are being watched. If there is some danger confronting us, you ought to tell me about it."

"Oh, it's nothing like that," said Hawley, smiling. "There happens to be a certain gentleman who would give his right arm to know what I'm up to, that's all. I rather expected to find him snooping around here and possibly trying to smuggle himself onto the cutter. I see there isn't much room for that sort of thing, but, before we cast off, I suggest that we make sure that we have no uninvited guests."

The expression in the officer's eyes

gave Hawley to understand that the man thought the suggestion bordered on the absurd, but just then the Camera Chap was not interested in what people thought. He meant what he said, and, personally, he subjected the little craft to a thorough search. Neither did he fail to scrutinize the four members of the crew.

The search was fruitless; Gale was not concealed on the cutter, nor was he masquerading as one of the crew. Impatiently the officer gave the word to cast off the lines. It was evident that the man of method and red tape did not approve of the Camera Chap and his apparently foolish notions.

The cutter started away from the pier. Hawley was a little puzzled; not so much by the barren result of the search as by the fact that the *Daily News* man had not put in an appearance at all. On the assumption that he had found it impossible to get on the cutter by stealth, Hawley had expected that, as a last resort, Gale would at least come down to the pier to witness the Camera Chap's departure, on the chance of being able to accomplish something by taking advantage of some unexpected development.

But now they were well out in the river, and Gale had not shown up on the pier. What was he doing? Had he actually given up? Hawley did not think so, and for the past ten minutes a more plausible explanation was in his mind. It was more than likely that Gale was in another boat and would trail the cutter.

Helping himself to the officer's binoculars, the Camera Chap proceeded to scan the river. At first the glasses revealed nothing suspicious; then Hawley's attention became centered on a large gasoline launch some fifty yards astern that did appear to be trailing the cutter. There were three men visible on the launch; Hawley was satisfied that none of them was Gale, but there

was no telling what the roomy cabin concealed.

The cutter headed directly down the bay. It passed the Statue of Liberty, passed on out through the Narrows, and soon the Ferris wheels, dizzy scenic railways, and other delights of Coney Island were visible as the little craft sped through the ship channel. The launch still followed, but now it was much farther astern. Either the cutter was the faster boat, or the launch was making no effort to keep up.

Hawley watched the trailing craft grimly; his concern was not lessened by its seeming inability to keep up with the cutter. The launch might be capable of making twice the cutter's speed, and if Gale were actually aboard it would be like him to hold back until the open sea was reached and then come up with a rush.

Hawley turned to the officer. "What do you make of that launch?" he asked. "She has followed us all the way from the city."

The officer took the glasses, but, after a few seconds' inspection, handed them back. "She's O. K.," he said. "See her every day. Bunch of summer chaps from the Atlantic Highlands."

He moved away irritably, and once again Hawley understood that the officer distinctly disapproved of him. The Camera Chap smiled again, but the man's quick identification of the trailer as an apparently harmless pleasure boat did not satisfy him. Perhaps the officer was right; they were on a much-traveled course; but in the circumstances the thing looked suspicious. Hawley continued to rake the launch with his glasses. If only he could see into that cabin!

But when the cutter was abreast of the Sandy Hook lightship, the launch was far in the rear, a barely visible speck. Puzzled, Hawley at last put down the glasses. His irritable sea-going host had altered the course

slightly, and now they were heading directly out to sea.

Again Hawley raised the glasses, but this time he did not train them on the suspiciously acting launch; he was focusing them on a large steamer now plainly visible straight ahead. Evidently she was stopped, rolling lazily in the calm sea. In a few minutes the glasses revealed the name on the bow: *Golden Star*.

Excepting a dirty-looking tug, puffing halfway between the steamer and the cutter and headed toward New York, there was no other vessel in sight. Anxiously Hawley swung the glasses around in search of the launch. He was greatly relieved to note that it was making no better progress than previously and was still little more than a speck in the distance.

Still suspicious, Hawley kept the glasses trained on the launch for several minutes. Then an exclamation from the officer caused him to turn sharply. A glance showed him that they were almost within hailing distance of the steamer.

"What's the matter with them!" cried the officer. "They're getting under way!"

Even as the man spoke, Hawley could see for himself that it was true. The *Golden Star's* propellers were churning the water and the ship was slowly turning seaward.

"Full speed—open her up to the limit, Joe!" cried the officer. He grabbed up a code flag, and, climbing to the top of the little cabin, waved it. Its engine pounding, the cutter fairly jumped through the water. The flag evidently was seen on the steamer, for an officer on the bridge was waving his arm in reply. But the *Golden Star's* propellers did not cease to turn.

However, the big ship had not as yet gathered much headway, and now the cutter was within hailing distance. An officer on the steamer's bridge raised a

megaphone to his lips. "It's all right, cutter; you needn't report," he shouted. "We don't want to stop!"

"But your passenger!" cried the cutter's officer, in a tone of great aggravation, while the Camera Chap suddenly grew tense, his eyes flashing.

"I tell you it's all right!" shouted the man on the *Golden Star's* bridge. "Mr. Hawley is already on board!"

CHAPTER X.

THE CRISIS OF THE DRAMA.

THE bewildered cutter officer lowered the megaphone and turned to his passenger. There was no time to waste on indirect questions and explanations, and the Camera Chap did not stand on ceremony. He snatched the megaphone from the man's hand and raised it to his own lips. "Heave to and take me on board," he called, in a clear, even, perfectly controlled voice. "You have been hoaxed—the man you have on board now is an impostor! This is the real Frank Hawley speaking!"

As Hawley ceased megaphoning, his eyes were on two men in steamer coats and caps standing at the stern of the vessel. Though the ship, having gathered headway, was beginning to draw away from the cutter, Hawley was sure that one of the men was Gale. The pair had turned to each other, and evidently were engaged in a rapid interchange of words.

The Camera Chap stood tense, holding his breath, as he watched that little scene. So this was what Gale had been doing, this was the explanation of his failure to put in an appearance that morning! How—but just at the moment Hawley was not interested in the hows or whys. He had the amazing fact to deal with, to battle with, and his whole being was centered on that momentous conference on the promenade deck. Would his megaphoned words have the desired effect—would the

Golden Star stop; or would Gale's cleverness be equal to the situation?

Then Hawley saw the man he believed to be Gale throw up his hands in a gesture of indifferent resignation as his companion quickly turned away from him and strode up the ladder leading to the bridge. Plainly the man was some one with authority, for, in response to a word, the officer handed over his megaphone and then stepped to the center of the bridge. Instantly the *Golden Star's* propellers ceased to turn. In a few minutes the big ship was scarcely moving, and the cutter, its engine stopped, was wallowing alongside.

Resting the now unnecessary megaphone on the cabin top, Hawley gazed up at the steamer's decks. At once he saw that he had made no mistake—the man at the stern was Gale, and, so far as appearances went, he stood there with the easy confidence of a man who is sure of his ground. He met Hawley's gaze, and for an instant a humorous, bantering light flashed in his eyes; then was replaced by a look of mild wonder and surprise.

Shifting his glance to the bridge, Hawley now recognized the other man. He was a little, wiry man of sixty or more, with sharp, striking features, and a rugged gray mustache. Though Hawley never had met him personally, countless pictures and cartoons he had seen proclaimed the little man as Senator Burton, famous up and down the land as the "Czar of Congress." The officer on the bridge was a fine, intelligent-looking man of forty. Probably he was the captain, but it was evident that the little senator was the real boss of the *Golden Star*.

Burton was standing at the top of the bridge ladder, leaning forward, his hands on the brass rails. "Well," he called sharply, "what is the meaning of that statement you megaphoned?"

"What I said is the simple truth,

senator," replied Hawley quietly; "if you will let me come aboard I shall explain——"

"I'm afraid you'll have to do a little explaining from where you are," Burton interrupted. "We have no time to waste. Speak up!"

"Senator Burton," answered the Camera Chap earnestly, "I am Frank Hawley, of the New York *Sentinel*, the man to whom you sent Congressman Clark, and to whom you sent a telegram last night signed by Clark. That man on the deck is Edward Gale, of the *Daily News*, a rival of mine, who managed to steal the telegram. Senator, this is too grave a matter to settle by a long-distance conversation. Won't you let me come aboard and prove my statements? I have papers, and, besides, there may be some one on board who can identify me."

The senator did not reply at once. He subjected the Camera Chap to a long, searching look. Then at last he spoke. "That's a very pretty story, Mr. Gale," he said, looking Hawley straight in the eyes, "but I'm afraid it won't do. You're acting right up to program. When you stole that telegram, Mr. Hawley suspected that you would try on something of this sort, and he beat you to it. He chartered a tug and came out here an hour ahead of you. You lose, Mr. Gale, and your next stop is New York."

Just for an instant Hawley was too dumfounded to reply. For sheer boldness and daring this was the limit! But now that he was no longer working in the dark, now that Gale's cards were on the table, the Camera Chap rose to the occasion. "Senator," he said, smiling, "are you convinced in your own mind that the man you have on board is the right one? If you are, your conviction must be based on what he has told you and on what he has shown you. Now, if you will give me a chance, I am positive my story will prove equally

worthy of consideration, and I have some documents with me that should establish my identity. It looks to me, senator, like a case of one man's word against another's. Can't we have a show-down?"

Again there was a pause before the senator replied. Gale continued to lean nonchalantly on the rail, not a muscle of his face moving. The officer on the bridge stirred uneasily, while the cutter's officer, evidently a victim of bewildered emotions, merely glanced blankly from one face to another.

"The man on board," said the senator finally, "has my original telegram."

Hawley's pulse beat fast. The senator's using the words "the man on board" instead of "Mr. Hawley" seemed to show that the former Czar of Congress was beginning to have his doubts. "I grant that he has a little on me as regards the telegram," Hawley said, "but I told you that he stole it. Isn't such a thing possible? Senator," he went on quickly, "as I said before, there may be some one on the ship who can identify me; but, if there is not—wireless to Congressman Clark for a description of the man you want!"

A tense silence fell. Hawley could see Gale's hands grip the rail. It was evident to all that the crisis of the little drama had arrived. The Camera Chap fully expected to see the senator act on his suggestion and turn to the wireless house. Burton, however, neither moved nor spoke. A minute went by while he stood motionless, his eyes boring the man in the cutter.

Suddenly Burton turned to the officer. "Captain," he said, "have the ladder lowered; we'll take this man aboard!"

It was too much for Gale. For a second he lost control of himself and took a wild step toward the bridge, quick words of protest on his lips. Then with a mighty effort he recovered his poise, for the senator's keen eyes were on him.

Chuckling to himself, the Camera Chap gathered his things, while the cutter maneuvered up to the lowering ladder.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE WAY OUT.

TEN minutes later the propellers of the *Golden Star* were again turning, and the cutter with its outraged man of red tape was a bobbing speck astern. The steamer was speeding directly out to sea. Gale was standing alone amidships, and now that he was unobserved, he had allowed his cheerful mask to drop and his face wore an anxious expression. He was awaiting the result of a conference between two men standing well forward on the deck, out of his hearing.

The two men were Hawley and Senator Burton. The Camera Chap had been talking earnestly, but now he paused, though it was evident that he had by no means finished what he intended to say. Instinctively he felt that Burton was inattentive; his keen perception told him that the senator either was thinking of something else or was not much impressed.

"My friend," said Burton, speaking in a grave, courteous tone, "your story is interesting; also the one or two documents you have shown me. Undoubtedly a way out of this awkward dilemma will present itself in due course. In the meantime, I must—er—request you to occupy a stateroom until such time as—er—the solution presents itself." He beckoned to a young officer hovering near.

"But, senator," said Hawley earnestly, "won't you act on my suggestion and wireless Clark? Surely that would be a simple and immediate way of settling this matter! Won't you at least see if there is not some one on board who knows me?"

"I shall take your suggestions under consideration," the senator replied, in

an absent-minded way. "Rogers, kindly show this gentleman to a stateroom—the one directly behind us here on this deck will do."

There was a finality in Burton's veiled command, and Hawley realized that any further attempt at argument would be undiplomatic. He was convinced that the senator had something up his sleeve. Did Gale know what that something was, or was the *Daily News* man equally in the dark? Then another idea sprang into Hawley's mind, a dismaying thought. Perhaps Burton doubted the claims of both men and was going to shut them both out of the big story, whatever it was! But, then, Hawley reasoned, he would have bundled them both back to New York. But obviously he was puzzled by the senator's strange manner. Why did he delay sending a wireless message to Clark? Or had he sent it and merely was awaiting the answer?

The senator was looking at him with that keen gaze of his, so Hawley did not permit any inkling of his thoughts to appear on his face. With a pleasant nod he turned and followed the young officer. The stateroom into which he was ushered was large and commodious, with a brass bedstead instead of berths, a writing table, and two comfortable chairs. Hawley knew that the *Golden Star* was a new government transport, and he guessed that the cabin was intended for an officer's quarters. Two large portholes opened onto the hurricane deck. Having assisted Hawley to bring in his camera, film box, and suit case, the officer left him to his thoughts.

The Camera Chap sat down and considered the situation. Though the senator had not put the thing in words, Hawley's good sense told him that he was to consider himself a prisoner.

While Hawley sat meditating on the position in which Gale had placed him, the latter was being conducted to a stateroom well aft and on the other side

of the ship. Half an hour later Burton appeared in Hawley's doorway. "My friend," asked the senator, "do you know any one on the battleship *Kentucky*?"

"I'm afraid not," Hawley replied, after a pause. "I know some naval men, but none on the *Kentucky*. She's been out on a Pacific station for two or three years, hasn't she?"

"Yes," said Burton. "It's too bad, for, you see, every man jack on this ship is from the *Kentucky*. By the way, lunch will be served in a few minutes. Rogers will take you in to mess."

The senator disappeared before Hawley could reply, and immediately Rogers came to the door and smilingly asked the Camera Chap to come to lunch. In a moment he found himself in the large dining saloon. Six or seven men in the uniform of United States naval officers were scattered about the room at small tables. Hawley noted that he and Rogers were seated at one end of the room, while Gale and another officer were at the other. The two newspaper men ignored each other's presence.

Hawley endeavored to start a conversation on general and harmless topics, but he soon desisted, for he found Rogers inattentive. The young officer was polite, but it was plain that his mind was elsewhere. Hawley was relieved, for he, too, had much to think about. Soon he noted that a strange silence prevailed at the other tables, and now he became aware that the atmosphere of the saloon was charged with an undercurrent of excitement. Later, back in his stateroom, his sharpened perception told him that the whole ship was charged with this same tense, suppressed feeling.

The hours went by, and Hawley, alternately sitting down and strolling around the cabin, found himself left severely alone, though he had an idea that he was under some sort of surveil-

lance by an officer who strolled along the deck outside at regular intervals. But seemingly nothing new in regard to him had developed, and the silence and uncertainty were beginning to get on his nerves.

Suddenly Burton poked his head through one of the ports. "Are you all right?" he asked carelessly, as if he were asking what time it was.

"I trust I am, senator," replied Hawley. "Might I ask how the dilemma is progressing? Have you received any reply to your wireless message, senator?"

"Wireless message?" said Burton. "Oh, there's plenty of time, plenty of time. Dinner will be served at seven. Rogers will take you in to mess."

Again the little senator disappeared abruptly. Savagely Hawley muttered something under his breath not exactly complimentary to America's popular statesman. If only something would happen! But the hours dragged on uneventfully. The sun went down and darkness crept over the sea. Seven o'clock came, and dinner, and Rogers, who invited Hawley to take some exercise with him on deck after the meal. Gale was visible promenading the opposite deck in similar company.

After the constitutional was over, Rogers stood in Hawley's doorway for a minute. "Mr.—er—Photographer," he said, "the senator sends his compliments and requests that you will kindly keep to your cabin this evening—and I advise you to do it, old man," he added, with a smile.

Hawley understood the advice. "I get you," he replied. "You can give my word to the senator that I shall not pass the door. Any objection to my viewing the wet scenery from the port?"

"None at all," said Rogers, grinning. "Help yourself to an eyeful any time you want."

Rogers shut the door behind him, but

he did not lock it. Left alone again, Hawley quietly sat down and opened a magazine that the officer had given him. He tried to read, but found it impossible. The situation in which he found himself simply would not allow it. Then, too, that strange, tense feeling that pervaded the ship was growing tenser; he knew it for a fact, though no one had mentioned it, and no one was with him.

His watch ticked away the minutes and hours. Not a soul on the ship seemed in the least concerned about him. At eleven o'clock he lay down on the bed and closed his eyes. He had no thought of sleep, but experience had taught the Camera Chap that it was the proper thing to do in the circumstances; just to lie quiet and wait.

Hawley's eyes had been closed only a few minutes when suddenly they opened and he sat up quickly. Something had happened at last and he knew what it was, though not what it might portend. The ship's propellers had ceased to turn. In a short while the changed motion of the vessel told him that she had stopped.

He jumped from the bed and went to one of the ports. The *Golden Star* was stopped—no doubt of that—and rolling lazily in the moonlit sea. At first Hawley could see nothing, but putting his head through the port and looking astern his eyes rested on a white yacht, lying about a quarter of a mile away. An exclamation escaped him. He knew that yacht; many people would have recognized it as it rested there, plainly visible in the brilliant moonlight.

As Hawley was looking out a figure stepped from the rail to the port. It was Rogers. "I'm sorry," he said, "but the senator has ordered me to request you not to look out of the ports again to-night; otherwise I shall have to close them, and you'll find it mighty stuffy in there."

"Too bad," replied Hawley. "Just when things seem to be getting interesting! But it's too hot to-night to be closed up."

He turned back into the cabin. But the Camera Chap's eyes were flashing. "Jove," he thought, "that yacht! Can it be possible?"

His back to the ports, he sat down; his mind alert; his senses keyed to the highest pitch. He did not know in what part of the vessel Gale was; did not know whether Gale was still under surveillance. Perhaps Gale had won. Had the *Daily News* man seen that yacht?

Hawley listened for every sound. He was sure that the noise he heard on deck now was that of the ladder being lowered, but, if so, it was being dropped from the other side of the ship. Half an hour went by, then the familiar sound was repeated; undoubtedly the ladder was being raised. Five minutes later the propellers began to turn again, and soon the ship was under way. The usual tense silence fell on the *Golden Star*, and seemingly the little flurry of action was over.

Ten minutes passed and Hawley was thinking of lying down again when the door opened and the captain entered. "Pardon me for disturbing you, sir," he said, in a noticommittal, official tone, "but I must ask you to write me a brief report of your claims. You have paper and pen there on the table."

A slight frown crossed Hawley's face. "But, captain," he protested, "I do not understand why——"

"Possibly, possibly," cut in the captain, "but I assure you it is necessary. Please begin at once. I shall wait."

Without replying, Hawley drew a sheet of paper toward him, dipped a pen and began to write, while the captain stood by, waiting.

But scarcely had he put pen to paper when he fancied he heard soft footfalls on the deck; the sound of some one pausing directly outside the ports. He

was about to turn and look, but just then the captain stepped to his side, leaned over, and calmly picked up the sheet of paper. "That will do," he said; "you need not write any more."

Hawley looked up at him, surprised. "But I haven't begun!" he exclaimed. "I haven't finished the first——"

"This will do nicely," said the captain, in his calm, official tone. While Hawley stared at him, slowly and with great deliberation the captain folded the paper. Then he stood gazing silently into space.

There was something in the man's manner that caused Hawley to check the words on his lips. For two minutes they both remained as they were, in a strange, awkward silence. Then, without warning, the door was flung open and two men entered. Hawley knew in a subconscious way that the second man was Burton, but he had no eyes for the little senator. It was the sight of the first man, coming toward him with hand outstretched and a smile on his face, that brought Hawley to his feet in an instant, his eyes shining with relief and recognition.

The man's tall, rather spare, but athletic figure was incased in a rumpled steamer coat; his slightly grayed hair showed under a shapeless cap; his features were strong, striking, unforgettable. "How are you, Mr. Hawley?" he said. "We haven't seen you in Washington for some time. It's a pleasure to see you again!"

Smilingly the Camera Chap put out his hand and returned the hearty, friendly grip of the President of the United States.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The succeeding chapters of this novel, beginning with Chapter XII., following an interesting sketch of all that has gone before, introduced for new readers, will appear in the next issue of *TOP-NOTCH*, dated and out March 1st.

Top-Notch Talk

By the Editor

BY WAY OF VARIETY.



APPRECIATIONS of the wide variety of stories published in this magazine often come to us. Here is one received from a reader in Houma, Louisiana. In the course of his letter, he says:

Just a few words edgewise. You have heard from me once before. I could not knock T.-N. if I tried to. The assortment of stories published in T.-N. are just splendid. I like to sit down and read, say, a little love story, and then jump to a Western tale, then an athletic story, and so on; and good, clean stories at that. That is why I think T.-N. the greatest magazine out. The only way to improve T.-N. would be to enlarge it; but you can't do that, with the price of paper sky-high. I wish you ever-increasing success; may your authors continue being worthy of their names!

The problem of variety is one of the several problems which the editor uses to divert his mind from less important matters. When he has nothing else to do he indulges in the pastime of pleading with authors to vary the themes upon which they build their stories.

It does not turn out very often that this undertaking is a picnic. Authors of good stories may be gifted people. Some of them pack a temperament. Others pack a gun for the editor who does not particularly admire their art. But most writers have their pet themes; they are better at one type of story than at other types; and the work they can do well they are likely to do *con amore*.

Some authors, for example, love the Western ranch and its life, and they would write about that always; other equally popular authors would do the same, and all would lay their products upon the editor's desk. If we printed all the ranch stories they would like to turn in we might have to change the name of the magazine to the *Corral* or the *Round-up*.

But this is a magazine of variety, and the authors learn to enjoy themselves some other way than by writing one kind of story all the time. You expect that, and you have a right to. Quail served on alligator pears may be regarded by many as a choice dish; they might even admit that they are crazy about it. And yet if they had it day after day for two weeks they would become sane about it, and cry: "Take it away!"

So it seems to be with readers who declare that they could read a certain kind of story issue after issue, and never grow tired. They retain that idea just so long as they remain readers of TOP-NOTCH. They get the variety that makes it possible for them to enjoy their favorite story when it comes along. If we gave their favorite in every issue they would soon join in the yell of the quail-on-alligator-pear crowd, saying: "Take it away!" Never was there a better expression of the art of contrast, we think, than that supplied by the next number of this magazine.

"LIVE WIRE RANCH."

FIRST on the roll appears Ralph Boston's complete novel; it will lead the number. It is a ranch story, but the first he has written in some time, so there is no call in his case for the monotony exterminator. The title is literally a suitable one. Never was

there a ranch in fact or fiction that had more live wires than the one which Mr. Boston has chosen for the stage of his stirring drama. Make sure of reading this unusual tale. It's an electrical story in more senses of the word than one. It has the "juice."



"OUT OF THE MIST."

HERE is a novelette by Burt L. Standish; and, while we are on the subject, let it be said that as a matter of variety he has no superior. "Out of the Mist" is so different from anything that the creator of Lefty Locke and Lego Lamb and innumerable other

characters has given us that one is struck with wondering admiration. It is a tale of coast folk in Maine, but with a human drama that, while true to its stage, is too big and significant in spirit to be confined to any particular locale.



TALES OF SPORT.

ONE of them is a novelette by Roland Ashford Phillips, called "Handicaps Mysterious." If any one ever had any doubt regarding Phillips' versatility it will disappear with the reading of this splendid story of auto racing on the Florida beaches. "The Cat in the Bag" is a tale with a marked baseball interest by that hee-hee maker, Frank X. Finnegan, who has just pitched his tent at a baseball training camp in the South. Another smile producer is one by John D. Emerson, who calls his effort "With Dot and Dash," because it has a lot to do with telegraphy. If telegraph operators do not find his telegraphy amusing they

will get some fun out of the story itself. Perhaps the only reason for putting Mr. Emerson's offering in the sport list is that you are sure to have plenty of sport reading it. A novelette whose claim to the sport designation cannot be questioned is one by W. E. Schutt—a running tale called "Beyond the Finish Tape." This is one of the biggest things in the way of a track story we have ever had the pleasure of presenting to TOP-NOTCH readers. Arnold Hoffman will be there with a humorous boxing story, called "In His Corner," and that completes the number of sport features in an issue particularly strong in that respect.



"AGAINST THE RED BOARD."

WHO does not enjoy a good railroad story? If there is a reader of that kind he has never made himself known in these pages. George C. Shinn, an occasional contributor to TOP-NOTCH, has written a railroad story—a long, complete one—which is

worth the special mention it is receiving here. The title, "Against the Red Board," expresses the spirit rather than the letter of the tale, and it has ample spirit. You are going to find this a big, dramatic story, pulsating with railroad life.

SOME SHORTER STORIES.

THERE is a good, generous feast of these. Among them Carlton Mattis gives us a fire-department tale called "Up to the Fire Fan," F. J. Jack-

son offers a laughable affair entitled "His Little Idea," and there is "A Lesson in Finance," written by M. and A. Barclay.



By Way of Suggestion.

AMONG several letters received—most of them complimentary—concerning Ray Wynn's lumberjack story "In the Great Boom," is one from Mr. Alexander Bub, of Third Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who says:

In his novelette, Mr. Wynn uses the word umpire to describe the man who decides the contest. I would like to know whether umpire is the correct word to use.

The contest in this story was wrestling. It is customary to call the judge of a wrestling match a referee, but umpire is a general term, just as judge is, and may be used properly, although in wrestling matches the word referee is preferred.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: It has been a long time since I've seen a letter from Baltimore, so I thought I would let you know that there are some admirers of T.-N. here. I have just finished reading your December 1st number, and I have never read a better story than "Service Mysterious." Although not a regular subscriber to the T.-N., I have not missed a copy in three years. It is a magazine the editor can well be proud of.

Please do not forget us with some ice-hockey and basket-ball stories this winter. Wishing you the best of success at all times, I remain,

ALBERT GOLLERY.

Baltimore, Md.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a steady reader of TOP-NOTCH since its inception in the fifteen-cent form. In fact, I have missed scarcely any issues. Your magazine is certainly, an innovation in producing good, clean, wholesome stories, with the right punch.

I presume, and always have been under the impression, that the editorial staff does not have plain sailing in securing stories up to the TOP-NOTCH standard. I, for one,

am astonished at the number of bright stories that you are publishing so regularly and consistently. In fact, in my candid opinion, I believe the stories are getting better all the time. You certainly got a fine group of writers, and I take off my hat to them. Burt L. is my favorite, with R. A. Phillips a close second.

I have a few suggestions to make: After each item of the contents which designates what part of the magazine the story is in, have the number of pages the story contains right after it, so a reader can tell instantly how long the story is. For example, something like this:

No Run for Their Money. By J. A.

Fitzgerald65—14

Are all the ten-cent numbers still in print of T.-N.? Very truly yours, C. T. V. H.

McMinnville, Oregon.

[Most of the ten-cent numbers of TOP-NOTCH are still available.—Ed.]

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Having been a reader of your magazine for the past four years, I wanted to state that I have always found it to be true to its name, which suits it to a T. Your sport stories just hit the spot, and those Northwest Mounted stories are all class; in fact, I find all the stories clear and clean and satisfactory, and this goes a long way.

Success to you and your works, and please give us more sport stories—anything but cricket. I remain, very truly yours,

S. E. LOGON.

Fourth Street N. W., Washington, D. C.



Those Big Cats.

A FRIENDLY tip to the editors of TOP-NOTCH comes from Mr. A. P. Rilfust, of Vermillion, South Dakota. It is in connection with that remarkable detective-circus story, by Bertram Lebhar, which was printed as a complete novel in a recent issue. Our correspondent in Vermillion says:

I am a steady reader of TOP-NOTCH, and

have just finished reading the issue of 15th inst. Please excuse bad spelling, as this typewriter stutters.

I was surely amused when I started to read the story, "Under the Big Top." It is quite evident that your author was thinking of cats when he wrote about the lioness and her five cubs. Lionesses, you know, hardly ever give birth to more than one cub at a time. Still, however, this lioness may have been fortunate enough to keep her family together for five years or more, but this is hardly probable.

I am not kicking, as I realize that men must live, and in the struggle for existence we all "slip" over little things, and as long as a majority of the people don't know any better there's no harm done.

In closing, I can do naught else but wish you whole tubfuls of success, and with the admonition to advise your manuscript readers to pay a little more attention to some of the "bulls."

The bad spelling is excused, because typewriters do sometimes stutter; but that cannot be an excuse for the bad information which comes from Vermilion concerning the maternal customs of the lioness. There was, in a cage of the Central Park Zoo the last time the editor of this magazine visited it, a lioness with three cubs, all playing merrily over and around their 'proud mother; and these cubs were all of the same age—all had the same birthday.

Yes, it is evident that Mr. Lebhar was thinking of cats when he wrote about the lioness and her five cubs. That was a good line of thought in the circumstances; so much are the animals of this species like tabbies that the circus men call them the big cats.

In stating the unusual size of the lioness' family, Mr. Lebhar's critic speaks out of his own knowledge; it is necessary to go beyond that sometimes if we would ascertain the facts. He speaks of something that "hardly ever" happens. It is the "hardly ever" in the life of men and beasts that makes good material for stories. Authors understand this, and they are fond of laying hold of the hardly ever. This they

have a right to do. It is the "never" that they may be criticized for not avoiding.

Had Mr. Rilfust caught Mr. Lebhar putting in his story something that never happens, he would have scored a point; but the author must accept as a compliment the accusation that he has made use of the unusual.

We are fond of the sort of criticism that sets us right; it is a help all around. A great deal of the criticism we receive is a contribution to the mass of mistaken ideas rather than to the world's sum of knowledge, and we are unable to avail ourselves of it. If you have any helpful criticism, send it along, first making sure that you are on the right track. That helps us in our task of publishing the magazine that is built for you.



FROM Lawrence, Massachusetts, with a request for an actual-place tale, we have the following from Mr. Ralph Smith, of Brook Street, that city:

I have been a steady reader of TOP-NOTCH ever since it was a 128-page magazine, and as you invite criticism, I thought I would write and tell how I like the "Top Notchiest" of all magazines.

There is rarely an issue that I don't read through from cover to cover. I would like Mr. Standish to write a complete novel of college life, with baseball as the chief theme. And if we are to have one, why not a hundred-page one? It is a long time since Burt L. has written a complete baseball novel.

Please wake up the Camera Chap. Don't let him take any more long vacations. And why not a complete story about him?

I notice that Rod Hazzard is back again. If this one is as good as the last three it will be a hummer.

I notice a lot of knocks about "The Cruise of the *Jasper B.*" by Don Marquis. I thought the story was great. Let him read this and take courage.

The difference between a long, complete novel and a novelette puzzles me. However, it doesn't really make any difference what you call 'em as long as they are as

good as the former ones have been. Please keep Standish, Lebhar, Boston, Lawrence, Phillips, Cook, De Polo, Emerson, et al, and you will have at least one steady reader. Yours truly, R.

Mr. Standish is at work on a baseball novel, which will appear in an early issue. The Camera Chap is wide awake, as you will see if you read the serial started in this number called "Mightier than the Pen."



The Hero in Trouble.

SYMPATHY with a hero in his troubles is always accepted by the author as evidence that he has done his work well. Some heroes do have a peck of trouble, but that gives them their chance to be heroes; so we need not always pity them. From West Elmira, New York, we have this, the writer being Mr. F. M. Cartwright, of Cleveland Avenue, that city:

I have been reading T.-N. for a good many years. It is a peach of a magazine, especially in regard to the baseball stories by B. L. S.; also the stuff by W. W. Cook. But I have one complaint to make. Who ever heard of a baseball player having so much trouble as Lego Lamb? I never did, and I have been following the game for a good many years; looking up records of players is one of my hobbies. Nevertheless, it is good reading, and give us more of it.

I get quite a bit of useful information from your baseball stories, as I am con-

nected with an athletic club, and the advice comes in handy.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a reader of many magazines for a number of years, and now there is only one magazine for me; its name is TOP-NOTCH. The main reason for my devotion to it is the wonderful, bright sport stories it contains.

And now for a little suggestion: Kindly write a story using an electrician and electricity as the theme. I am sure this wonderful energy could be worked into a good story. You could use a big municipal plant such as the one we enjoy and are proud of in Cleveland.

Thanking you for the many hours of enjoyment your authors have given me, I remain, yours truly, W. WALLACE.

West Fifty-second Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I do not think it necessary to praise T.-N. All I need do is to point to my length of service in the T.-N. army. Over three years now, without a miss. I think that should show whether I like your magazine or not.

"The Grip of the Game" was a corker; give us more, more, and some more. Wishing you continued success, I am, very truly yours, ROLAND D. ROGERS.

Plainfield Street, Springfield, Mass.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I have been a reader of your magazine for a year. The first thing I read is the "Talk." I believe it brings the different readers closer together. My favorite authors are Burt L. Standish, W. W. Cook, Bertram Lebhar, and last, but not least, Roland Ashford Phillips. From a constant reader, FLOYD MILLER.

Plymouth Street, Whitman, Mass.



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Mr. Ralph E. Weeks, President,
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Scranton, Pa.

Dear Sir.

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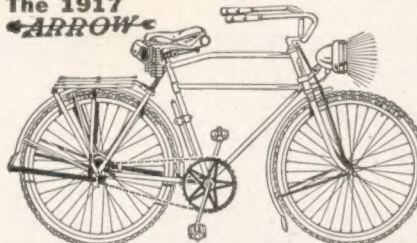
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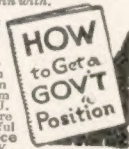
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